

# God's People and Governing Powers

When to Defer and When to Disobey

# In Western Society

- Believers have historically enjoyed both individual and religious freedoms
- Today those freedoms are being challenged
- With antagonism rising, how should the Church respond to government hostility?
- We are to submit to those who rule over us
- However, the Bible stops short of requiring blind obedience.

# Supreme Allegiance

- When they had brought them, they stood before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than man.”

Acts 5:27-29

- So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.

Acts 5:38-39

# Old Testament Example

Shadrach, Meshash and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Daniel 3:16-18

# Supreme Allegiance

- This first principle defines us as followers of Christ. We give our supreme allegiance to the Lord Jesus as our heavenly King.
- We are first and foremost citizens of heaven.
- For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Phil. 3:20-21

- Because our supreme allegiance belongs to Christ, His Word serves as our highest authority.
- “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”      Matthew 7:26-27

- Our loyalty is to Him, and we view our lives as an act of worship to Him, seeking to honor and please Him in all we do.
- Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1

- When we submit to governing authorities, we do so out of obedience to Christ.
- Conversely, if obedience to our Lord requires us not to comply with a government mandate, *we must obey God rather than man.*

Acts 5:29

# Sovereign Appointment

- God sovereignly ordains those in positions of political power. God is the supreme authority over the entire universe. No other authority exists without His express permission and sovereign determination.
- Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

- God has defined the proper role of government in His Word.
- They are to promote good while protecting the righteous, preventing evil and punishing the wicked.
- Turn to Romans 13:1-7

# Why Obey Authority

- All authority is established by God
- Opposing authority is opposing God and will receive condemnation
- Do what is good and you will receive praise
- God brings wrath on those who do evil
- It is necessary to be in subjection to authority
- Render to all what is due them

# Secular Animosity

- Whether Pharaohs or Roman Emperors, or even Kings of Israel, persecution and mistreatment have come from hostile governments and their leaders. Jesus warned his followers they would be mistreated for His sake.
- If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1 Peter 4:14

- Though Jesus was severely mistreated, He did not respond with anger, violence, or vengeance. He exemplified long suffering, patience, and silence in His suffering.
- Even when persecuted believers are still commanded to maintain an attitude of submission towards those in authority. We should not seek retribution, but respond with patience and grace.

# Submissive Attitude

- 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. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience towards God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 1 Peter 2:17-19

# Spheres of Authority

- God has ordained distinct spheres of authority within human society.
- Believers are called to submit to human authorities. There are some matters that fall outside the jurisdiction of civil authority.
- Believers throughout history have identified worship practices, doctrinal convictions, and church polity as matters not subject to the authority of the state.

# An Order To Do What Is Wrong

- Potiphar's wife – Genesis 39:7-10
- Pharaoh's order to the midwives – Exodus 1
- Rehab protects the spies – Joshua 2:2-7
- Saul commands the Priests be killed – 1 Sam. 22
- Herod's request of the Magi – Matthew 2
- True believers will refuse the mark of the beast – Revelation 13
- When believers cannot comply, they should be both respectful and resolute.

# An Order to Stop Doing What Is Right

- Daniel ordered to stop praying – Daniel 6
- Esther approached the king without an invitation – Esther 4
- The Apostles told to stop preaching in the name of Jesus – Acts 4
- Believers instructed to not forsake their assembling together – Hebrews 10
- William Tyndale was told to stop translating the Bible

# An Order That Contradicts Another Legitimate Authority

- Believers often find themselves under multiple levels of authority.
- When a lower governing authority contradicts a higher governing authority believers can appeal to the higher governing authority.
- Esther's appeal to the king to overcome the malicious intention of Haman in Esther 7 is a good example
- Paul appealed as a Roman citizen when a magistrate in Philippi said he must leave town Acts 16

# An Order to Stay Silent in the Face of Evil

- What should we do when people in power openly violate God's law?
- The prophet Nathan confronted King David
- John the Baptist publicly rebuked Herod
- We must still do so in a manner that shows respect for the position or office held by those in authority.

# An Order to Turn Yourself in to a Persecuting Authority

- If a governing authority is persecuting the people of God, believers are permitted to flee and hide.
- They should not respond with violence, but are not required to turn themselves in to a wicked authority that seeks their destruction.
- When rulers act wickedly, believers are right to condemn their wicked behavior. Christians are not being insubordinate when they call their leaders to live according to God's law.

# Examples from Scripture

Jonathan disobeys his father's order to kill David and instead helps him hide.

Joseph and Mary fled from Herod to protect baby Jesus.

Paul fled Damascus to avoid capture

When believers disobey the government, doing so to obey God, they must be willing to accept the consequences without violence. The Bible allows believers to flee and hide, but when found, they are not allowed to resist in anger or respond with an attitude of retribution. Acts 5:40-42

# Preparing For Coming Persecution

- Jesus warned his followers that they would be hated and harassed for His sake. (John 15)
- Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12
- Listen to Paul's encouragement to Timothy
- For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. 2 Timothy 1:12-14