

Submit To Governing Authorities

1 Peter 2:13-17

13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17 (NKJV))

And may I also give us a similar instruction from the Book of Romans, chapter 13!
Listen!

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.
(Romans 13:1-7)

These are Strong words! Very strong words!

As we read through these and other scriptures like them, we find a clearly resounding message interwoven throughout all of them regarding the matter of our response and our obedience to the many forms of authority that are placed over us. Whether that authority be the laws and the statutes themselves, or it be the human hands that minister them to us, the Lord's clear instruction to us is that the positions and the people in authority are a provision from Him, intended for our benefit and protection, and that our response and our behavior towards those authorities are to be that of "humble submission" and "obedience".

And while we don't have a "king" or other such "absolute" monarchy ruling over us as did the Apostle Peter, the concept still holds true for you and me, even within this "democratic" form of governance that we live in here in America.

May we begin our consideration of these words here in 1st Peter 2 by reminding ourselves that these are not mere suggestions from God, general guidelines with many possible options available within them! Not at all! These are commands, words from God intended for the purpose of developing essential standards of conduct within your and my souls, rules of behavior that are intended to establish the boundaries of what should become our "usual", our "typical", our "normal" response toward the laws and the authorities placed over us.

And yes, there are times and circumstances given within these scriptures that speak about "permitted exceptions" to these standards, and we will examine some of those later in this message. But aside from those rare exceptional times and circumstances, this that we are reading about here today is to be our usual, our common, our only "acceptable" manner of conduct and behavior as we live and move and have our being within the social and cultural order that surrounds us each day, in our homes, in our community, in our state and in our nation.

Simply put, we are to be "under submission" to all those who are in authority, and especially those within our governmental positions of authority.

Why must that be so with you and me, especially as it relates to our now being part of the family and the kingdom of God? It is because God, our beloved Father, has put those authorities into place and He has done it for our benefit. And we dare not resist those authorities, because when we do, we are resisting Him and His will. Listen again!

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:1-2)

And we are to be under submission also because of who we now are. Recall the words that God gave to us in the verses just before He instructed us here to "submit to our governing authorities". He said that we are now a whole new and different people from that which we once were in our former rebellion. We are now a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own special people, that we may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light; that we once were not a people but are now the people of God. We once were lost and without mercy in our sin, but now we have obtained mercy.

And because of who we now are, we are to abstain from the fleshly lusts that once warred so strongly against our souls. And we are to conduct ourselves honorably among all those that we encounter in our day, so that anyone who observes our behavior will turn and glorify God, our Savior.

And again, that behavior is to be especially so as we concern ourselves with matters that come through our governmental authorities, whether it be from our president, our congress, our supreme court, even our state and local authorities. We are to “honor” the people and the rules of law that they bring to us.

But unfortunately for us, submission and honor of the kind spoken about here are not an easy and ordinary part of the nature that was born into our sinful souls. And to make matters even more difficult, those in authority over us seem daily to be able to provide us with even more and more reasons why we would not want to show them honor and respect and submission, our president, our national lawmakers and our Supreme Court. Daily those authorities keep giving us opportunity after opportunity for disdain and disrespect and for dishonoring thoughts and responses!

And here of late, as seen on our televisions, we are a nation that harbors the deepest of scorn and contempt even for our local policemen, those that we surely will want to call when we are in need of protection and help.

A warning that God gave to us one verse earlier, verse 12, speaks of where much of that scorn and contempt begins. It begins within our thought processes and then it quickly flows on out into our ordinary conversation. Listen, verse 11,

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles. (1 Peter 2:11-12 (KJV))

Our thoughts just seem to “slip out of our mouth”. And whether we want to admit it or not, our words really are an expression of a deeper and more troublesome attitude of disrespect within our heart! Jesus said,

18 . . . what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. (Matthew 15:18-20 (ESV))

A question . . . do these words mean that even if I just think about sinful things that I have become sinful? Not always . . . but maybe . . . perhaps even yes! It depends a lot on what you did with those thoughts. How long did you meditate on those thoughts.

Did you “entertain” them in your mind and heart? Or were they just brief thoughts that you immediately rejected.

If we “entertain” sinful thoughts for very long, that is, if we let our minds dwell on sinful matters and behaviors, then yes, they can quickly become sin to us. And they will surely come flowing out from our mouths. Listen! James 3,

6 The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (James 3:6 (NIV))

Again, when thoughts of disrespect and distrust come into our minds concerning our government leaders, we must quickly cast them out, else they will surely come flowing out from our mouth, corrupting not only ourselves, but also everyone around us. And that is especially so when we consider some of the recent high-profile court rulings, such as those that take all boundaries off homosexual behavior and even requires each of us to accept and support their lifestyle and behavior.

And what about our government’s manner of handling the radical Islamist terror agenda, does that not churn up anger and resentment within your heart towards our leaders?

So then, yes, while we might not ever find ourselves protesting in the streets against the police in Ferguson Missouri, we might be able to see ourselves voicing discontent about these other matters, abortion, acceptance of homosexual behavior and especially Islamic terrorism.

I am not able to address, first hand, the hardships that the citizens of other nations endure as they live under their many different forms of governance, especially those who live under brutal and oppressive dictatorial regimes, but I accept that it can be so very difficult for them.

But for ourselves here in “small town America”, our lot is not so difficult. For the most part, we live in relative comfort, especially as it regards personal mistreatment by our governmental authorities. And having the circumstance that we have, what is God telling us that our usual, our normal, our “acceptable” response is to be? Listen again!

13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17 (NKJV))

While yes, there is a possibility, perhaps even a probability that we will someday be attacked and harmed by a terrorist that our government should have stopped, and also our tax dollars will probably be misused by giving them to Planned Parenthood where they will be used to kill babies, the reality is, we ourselves will probably be able to live in relative peace and comfort most all of our days. And while our relative comfort is not a license for us to “do nothing” when we should have been “doing something” to stem the rise of governmental tyranny, these words in our text are admonishing us to have a right conscience and behavior and conversation regarding our authorities.

The instruction within these words is simply for you and me to make every effort to humbly obey all the laws and ordinances that have been established by our governmental leaders, and to respect and honor the ones who minister those laws to us, the president, the legislators, the courts, the policemen, and on and on. That is to be our usual, our common, our ordinary behavior. And we should exercise our obedience with a joyful heart and not with a reluctant spirit.

Simply put, most all of the laws that are in effect in our nation today are good and proper laws. And regardless of whether we fully understand and agree with them, we really ought to, as our “usual”, our “common”, our “ordinary” behavior, humbly obey them with a joyful heart.

And may I say that again? With most all of the laws and most all the circumstances we encounter each day, humble obedience should be our usual, our common, our ordinary behavior.

And we really can do that within most every circumstance. But as I mentioned at the onset of this message, there will be rare and exceptional circumstances when strict obedience might not be the proper response, those times when the authority and the laws of man become so egregious that they obviously collide with the laws of God. And yes, we already do have some of those laws in place in our nation even today, and we are very likely to have more and more of those laws enacted in the future. What then are we to do with those laws? What is to be our response?

These scriptures do provide for some exceptions to our strict obedience. Jesus spoke about it in His response concerning the tax laws that were in effect during His day. He said,

“25 . . . "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Within those very infallible words, Jesus is revealing to us that there will be times when serious choices will have to be made.

Consider . . . in these words, Jesus spoke first about rendering unto Caesar that which is of Caesar, indicating that for the most part, and even though we might differ strongly with our leadership in some matters, if those matters are simply of a philosophical nature, our instruction is simply to submit to their leadership and to obey them. And may I add, this instruction is appropriate even when we know that our leaders might be very wrong.

But, the second part of Jesus' instruction tells us that there will be times when serious discernment may be called for, such as, when the instructions and laws given by our leadership are blatantly evil and clearly in direct opposition to the laws of God. It is then that a hard choice may be required of us to obey God rather than our governmental authorities.

We are given several examples of this in the scriptures. You will recall that in the Book of Exodus, the Hebrew midwives were ordered to kill all the newborn male Jewish babies, but they refused to obey and instead let the babies live.

Also in Joshua chapter 2, Rahab directly disobeyed a command from the king of Jericho to reveal the Israelite spies who had come to the city. And though she resisted her authorities, God blessed her for it.

Also the Book of Daniel records a number of examples of civil disobedience, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who refused to bow down to the golden idol, also Daniel defied King Darius' decree to not pray to anyone other than the king. In both cases, God showed His approval of their actions and rescued them from certain death.

In the New Testament, in defiance of strict instruction from the religious leaders, Peter and John kept on preaching about Jesus. And in Acts 4, Peter said,

19 "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard". (Acts 4:19-20)

So then, may we conclude by saying that yes, in most every circumstance of our daily life, we are to diligently, joyfully and humbly obey all the laws and authorities that are placed over us. But we must also accept that there might come to us those rare circumstances when the laws of man directly conflict with the laws of God. And it is then that we must resist and disobey.

And in both circumstances, we will probably be required to suffer. But if suffering is the right thing to do, then we must do it to the praise and worship of our God!

13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,
(1 Peter 2:13-17 (NKJV))

Praise be to God!