

The Church and Government

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper

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Christians have only two responsibilities to their earthly government, submission and supplication.

Submission (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

According to Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17, Christians are commanded to submit to their governing authorities. It is important to note that these commands were given to people living under a totalitarian and anti-Christian government. There is no exception clause that exempts submission when government entities are exceedingly wicked.

1. Examples of when disobeying the government is allowed

It is righteous to disobey the government only when the government usurps God's authority. The four examples of this from the Bible are:

- a. When it does not allow worship of God (Exodus 5:1).
- b. When it commands us to kill the innocent (Exodus 1:15-21; 1 Kings 18:1-4).
- c. When it commands worship of idols or of men (Daniel 3, 6; Revelation 13).
- d. When it forbids believers to propagate the gospel (Acts 4:17-19).

2. Summary of when disobeying the government is allowed

We must distinguish between what the government allows and what the government commands. If the government commands us to do evil, we must not submit to this demand. The government can permit evil but they rightfully cannot command it. They can allow idol worship but when they insist upon it we are obligated to refuse.

We must distinguish between when the government limits religious freedom and when the government negates religious freedom. Disobedience is not allowed simply because government restrict our ministry. Rather, it must forbid our ministry. Freedom must be limited to some extent for the sake of the society as a whole.

3. Description of how we should disobey government

- a. We should refuse, not revolt. The Bible consistently condemns revolution (Numbers 16; 2 Samuel 15; 1 Kings 12).
- b. Our disobedience must be passive, not active. Jesus taught against the use of force. (Matthew 5:38; Matthew 26:52).

c. We should accept the consequences (Peter went to jail in Acts 5).

4. Application of disobedience to the government

The United States of America was founded upon civil disobedience. It is not a popular thing to consider the American Revolution to be wrong. However, if the apostolic church was instructed to submit their government which oppressed the church not only economically but physically, how much more should the Colonialists have submitted in light of simply "taxation without representation." Indeed, many Christians at the time of the Revolution were opposed to the overthrow of England for this very reason.

However, we can still celebrate the Fourth of July as Independence Day just as we can celebrate the birthday of a child conceived in rape. We do not celebrate the sin, but we can still celebrate the blessing.

5. Conclusion

It is better to submit to an evil authority than to submit to the evil of rejecting authority. Since all authority is established by God and since God is sovereign, we should trust Him with the outcome (cf. Proverbs 21:1).

Supplication (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

The instruction of 1 Timothy 2:1-4 regarding prayer for our government leaders is specific:

1. We should pray with thanksgiving for governmental leaders (1 Timothy 2:1).
2. We should pray for all governmental leaders around the world (1 Timothy 2:2).
3. We should pray for the salvation of the governmental leaders (1 Timothy 2:3-4).
4. The reason we are to pray is so that our conflict with the governmental leaders will be at a minimum and we can serve the Lord in the ministry of the gospel in peace (1 Timothy 2:3).
5. We should pray for the leaders so they will look on the church favorably as we conduct ourselves in a godly and dignified manner as God has called us to (1 Timothy 2:2).

The prayer for the leaders is so that the church may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Tranquil refers to the absence of external disturbance and quiet means the lack of internal conflict. In godliness and in a dignified manner, we must avoid disruptive behavior. It is disappointing to see Christian leaders willing to agitate the life of our nation over issues that are outside the mandate to bring the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to the world. Our prayers and holy living should move us toward peace for the sake of bringing the gospel to the world.

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