

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

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PART 26: SUBMIT TO CAESAR?

In this message we are going to study the controversial matter of submission to government. Should a Christian blindly submit to government? Is it lawful to resist an evil government? Over the centuries Christians have struggled with this issue and this week we will examine what Paul wrote and compare it with biblical history.

GOVERNMENTS DURING THE TIME OF JESUS

All nations from the time of Nimrod until the arrival of Jesus were dictatorships, with the exception of Israel, which was a theocracy. Democracy simply did not exist. The Roman Empire was a republic where the power was shared between the Emperor and the Senate.

In other nations, there was a king with absolute power and succession usually went to a son when the father died. There were also many bloody coups and thousands of people died.

Within the Roman Empire, there were aristocrats, government officials, military officers, merchants, soldiers and workers. Millions of slaves were used to propel the Roman economy. They had no basic human rights; they were just a commodity that could be bought and sold like cattle. Slave owners had the right to kill a slave if he was found to be working poorly.

People in conquered nations like Israel had no legal rights. The Romans set up Herod as a vassal king and also appointed a governor (Pontius Pilate) to oversee matters. The Jews were allowed to govern themselves as long as their laws did not contradict Roman law.

The Roman government wanted law and order in order for commerce and manufacturing to prosper. In general, Roman laws protected people from crime. It was in the interest of the government for people to live in peace and be productive. All nationals were forced to pay tax to Rome. Productions and prosperity allowed more taxes to flow into the Roman treasury.

This is the background that needs to be understood when reading Romans chapter 13.

ALL RULERS ARE ORDAINED BY GOD

No man can become king of a nation unless it has been decreed by God. **Romans 13:1; Proverbs 8:15-16; Daniel 4:13-17; John 19:10-11; 1 Peter 2:13-17**

Does that mean that Christians should submit to evil governments? No, when Paul wrote this letter, Roman law protected people and made it possible for them to travel freely within the empire, to hold property and conduct business, including preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus the Roman government in Paul's mind was good and Christians should submit to its authority.



The apostle Paul like the rest of the apostles believed that the second return of Jesus was imminent and that Christ would come back during his lifetime and this is why Paul wrote that the Christians should support the Roman government. He did not know that Rome would decay and cease to exist, nor did he know that some 1,950 years after writing this epistle, Jesus would still not have come back to the earth.

WHEN TO RESIST GOVERNMENTS

Let's examine how God's people resisted and rejected governments:

1. The king of Egypt was bent on destroying the children of Israel and ordered midwives to kill all male babies. They refused to follow this evil decree and obeyed God instead. **Exodus 1:15-21**
2. The leadership of Israel submitted to the Midianites and had given orders for the people of Israel to comply with the Midianites and sacrifice to their god, Baal. When God sent an angel to Gideon and told him to tear down the altar of Baal, Gideon obeyed God and rejected the orders of the ungodly leadership. **Judges 6:22-32**
3. David tried to serve King Saul and be a loyal servant to him. What did David do when Saul decided to kill him? Did he submit to the will of this now evil king? No, he fled and built up a resistance movement against Saul. **1 Samuel 22:1-5**
4. As a young teenager Daniel refused to comply with the ungodly edicts of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. **Daniel 1:1-17**
5. The prophet Elijah refused to comply with King Ahab's idolatrous lifestyle and confronted him face to face. **1 Kings 18:17-24**
6. Elijah refused to obey a sinful king and his government and God supernaturally supported Elijah's decision. **2 Kings 1:1-17**
7. John the Baptist refused to comply with the sins of King Herod and told him it was a sin to take his brother's wife. This bold stand for truth would cost John his life. **Matthew 14:1-12**
8. Jesus refused to comply with the Jewish leadership and they had Him crucified. **Matthew 23:13-35; 27:22-25**
9. Peter and John made it clear to the Jewish government leaders that they were not going to comply with their ungodly demands. **Acts 4:7-21**
10. If the American colonists had not declared independence in 1776 and had instead submitted themselves to the king of England, the United States of America would not exist today.

SUMMARY

A Christian should submit to a government as long as it does not violate the Word of God. If a government is evil, Christians should resist and overthrow it. **Proverbs 25:5**