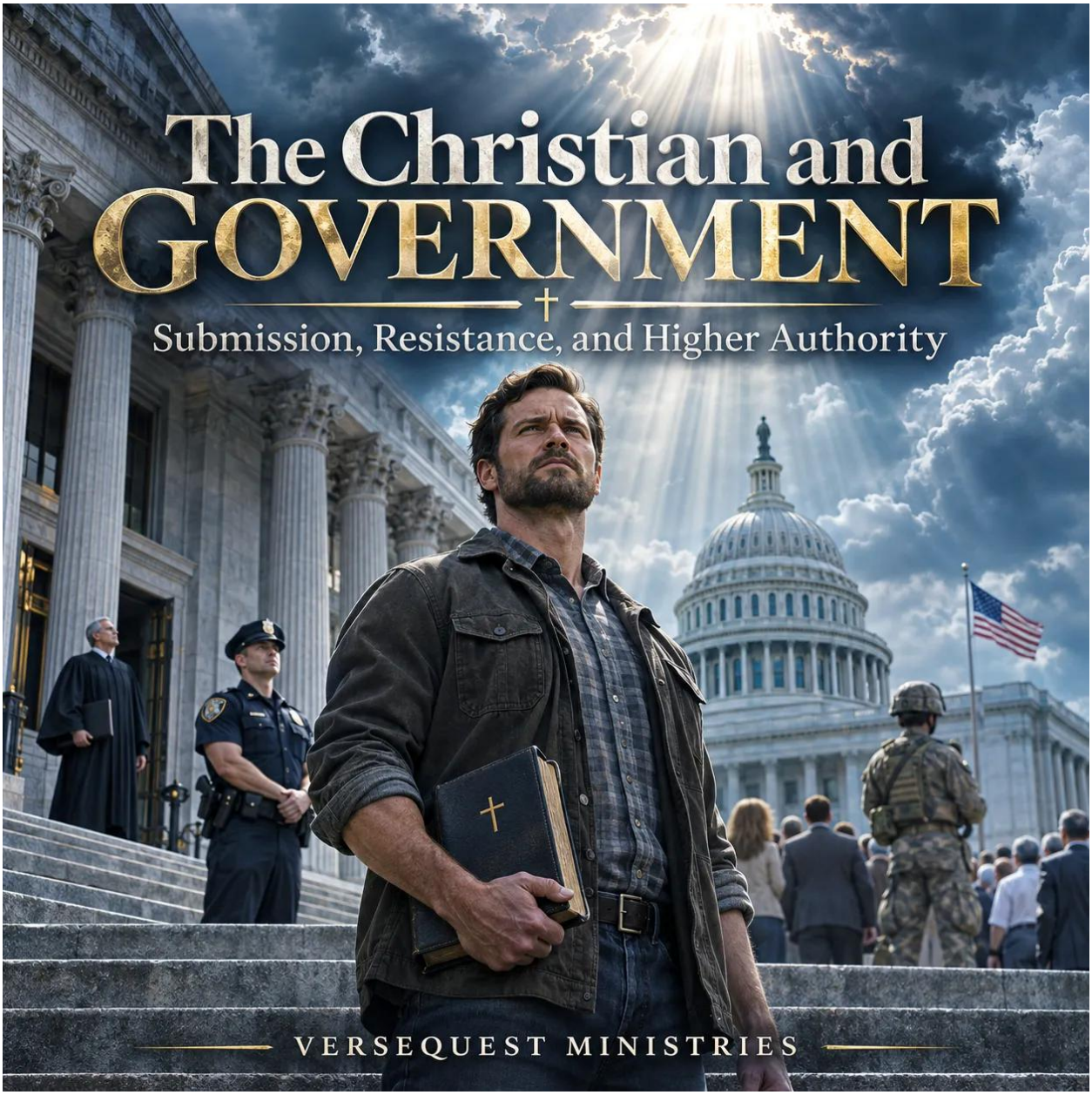
The Christian and Government

Submission, Resistance, and Higher Authority

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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The Christian and Government

Submission, Resistance, and Higher Authority

Written by Pastor Paul Tackett
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The Christian and Government

Submission, Resistance, and Higher Authority

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Introduction — The Christian and Government

Submission, Resistance, and Higher Authority

There is something terribly wrong when a Christian knows more about the occupant of the White House than the One who sits upon the throne of heaven. Some believers can tell you every political controversy, every campaign promise, every argument about taxes, and every accusation against the opposing party, but ask them to explain Romans 13 and Acts 5 together, and suddenly the conversation gets mighty quiet. On one side, we have Christians who treat government as though it were the devil's personal invention, refusing legitimate authority and calling every inconvenience persecution. On the other side, we have religious people who practically worship political power, excuse wickedness when their preferred candidates commit it, and act as though Jesus Christ needs an election victory to maintain His authority. Neither crowd has properly understood the King James Bible. God did not ordain civil government so Christians could spend their lives rebelling against it, and He certainly did not establish government so politicians could take His place. The Lord ordained an institution with genuine authority, defined responsibilities, and unmistakable limitations. The trouble begins when men forget where that authority came from and Who stands above it.

Romans 13:1 declares, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” There is the foundation, and the Christian who dislikes it had better take his argument up with the Holy Ghost who inspired it. Government is not inherently wicked merely because sinners occupy its offices. God established civil authority to restrain wrongdoing, punish evildoers, protect innocent people, and preserve a measure of order in a world filled with fallen men. Without legitimate government, the strongest criminal would become the law, and every disagreement could be settled by whoever possessed the largest weapon. Yet Romans 13 does not declare every ruler righteous, every court honest, or every governmental command acceptable before Almighty God. Pharaoh occupied a throne, but his command to murder Hebrew children was wicked. Nebuchadnezzar ruled an empire, but his golden image was still idolatry. Pilate possessed Roman authority, but his condemnation of the sinless Son of God remained unjust. **God ordained government, not every sin committed by the men who operate it. A throne may be legitimate while the man sitting upon it is as crooked as a dog's hind leg.**

This series will confront the entire matter without political favoritism, religious cowardice, or the foolish notion that the Bible must be adjusted to accommodate modern government. We will examine why God established civil authority, what Christians owe to Caesar, why law enforcement and judicial punishment have a legitimate place in society, and how the

Scriptures address soldiers, military service, and the proper use of force. We will examine voting, political parties, public service, and the danger of turning political identity into a substitute for sound doctrine. We will confront bribery, corrupt courts, dishonest politicians, abuse of governmental power, and the Christians who condemn such behavior only when the guilty party belongs to the opposition. We will establish why believers must pray for rulers even when they strongly oppose their policies. And we will examine the serious point at which submission must end because government has crossed the boundaries established by God. These are not matters to be settled by campaign advertisements, angry commentators, or religious traditions. They must be settled by opening the Scriptures, rightly dividing the word of truth, and accepting what God actually said.

The Christian should have no difficulty recognizing that lawful authority deserves respect. Romans 13:7 commands, “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.” That instruction does not disappear when taxes increase, regulations become inconvenient, or an election produces an administration we would never have supported. A believer should be honest in financial dealings, responsible in civic obligations, respectful toward legitimate offices, and unwilling to manufacture unnecessary confrontations. Yet the same Bible that commands submission also commands obedience to God above men. Acts 5:29 declares, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” These passages do not contradict one another. They establish the proper relationship between delegated earthly authority and supreme divine authority. The government may require lawful obedience, but it cannot command idolatry, murder, denial of Christ, or participation in wickedness. **Caesar may possess the authority to collect a tax, but he does not possess the authority to collect a Christian's worship. He may govern the affairs of his earthly jurisdiction, but he cannot issue commandments to the throne of heaven.**

One of the greatest dangers facing Christians today is the confusion between patriotism and political idolatry. There is nothing inherently wrong with loving one's country, honouring those who have served it, respecting its lawful institutions, or desiring righteous government. Christians may exercise their citizenship, speak against corruption, advocate for justice, and seek the welfare of the communities in which they live. But when national identity begins replacing biblical identity, when political loyalty becomes stronger than loyalty to Scripture, and when the Church begins imagining that its primary commission is to capture the machinery of government, something has gone badly wrong. The Lord Jesus Christ declared in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The Church was not commissioned to manufacture the Millennial Kingdom through elections, legislation, or military conquest. The United States is not the replacement for Israel. Its political

institutions do not inherit Israel's national covenants, and its elected officials do not occupy the throne promised to David. **A nation cannot become Israel by hanging a flag in the sanctuary, and a political movement cannot become the kingdom of God merely because its representatives know how to quote Scripture during election season.**

That does not mean believers should become indifferent to wickedness in public life. Proverbs 29:2 declares, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” A government that protects innocent citizens, administers honest judgment, and restrains wrongdoing performs a legitimate responsibility. A government that excuses criminals, oppresses the vulnerable, accepts bribes, manipulates courts, or turns public office into a private business has corrupted that responsibility. The Scriptures condemn both the justification of the wicked and the condemnation of the just. A badge cannot sanctify brutality, a judicial robe cannot disguise dishonesty, and a politician's religious vocabulary cannot wash corruption out of his conduct. Yet Christians must be equally careful not to become liars while attempting to expose liars. Ephesians 5:11 commands believers to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. It does not authorize gossip, fabricated accusations, malicious exaggeration, or personal vengeance. **If you have to violate the commandments of God to expose somebody else violating them, you have already surrendered the righteousness you claim to defend.**

There is also the matter of persecution, and the Bible is neither silent nor sentimental about it. The apostles were arrested, threatened, beaten, and commanded to stop preaching Jesus Christ. James was killed with the sword. Peter was placed in prison. Paul and Silas were beaten and confined, yet they continued praising God and proclaiming the gospel. Those accounts establish that faithful believers may suffer under governments hostile to the truth. Nevertheless, the Bible carefully distinguishes suffering for righteousness from suffering because of personal wrongdoing. A Christian prosecuted for fraud has not become a martyr merely because he carries a Bible into the courtroom. A preacher who deliberately manufactures disorder cannot automatically compare himself with Peter standing before the council. First Peter 4:15 warns believers against suffering as evildoers, while verse 16 declares, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” Genuine persecution must be recognized, but it must not be manufactured. When government directly forbids what God commands or commands what God forbids, faithfulness may carry a serious price. The Christian should neither seek suffering unnecessarily nor purchase comfort by surrendering the truth.

Another matter that must be settled is the Christian's responsibility to pray for those in authority. First Timothy 2:1–2 commands supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

thanksgiving for all men, specifically including kings and all who occupy governmental positions. Paul did not attach an exception for rulers whose policies offended believers or whose political affiliations were unpopular among the churches. The command was given when Christians lived beneath pagan Roman authority, not beneath a government composed entirely of born-again Bible believers. A Christian may oppose a politician's decisions, seek lawful correction of his misconduct, and refuse to support his policies while still praying for his salvation, wisdom, and righteous conduct. Indeed, the spiritual needs of rulers are far greater than their political ambitions. A president may command military forces, sign legislation, and influence the lives of millions, but he cannot forgive his own sins or purchase eternal life. The same gospel that saves the prisoner is necessary for the man who signs the prisoner's sentence. **It is a strange Christianity that can spend all afternoon shouting about Caesar and never spend five minutes speaking to the God who holds Caesar's heart in His hand.**

Above all, we must rightly divide the word of truth and distinguish the present calling of the Church from the prophetic future of Israel. God made specific promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David concerning the land, kingdom, and future of Israel. Those promises have not been transferred to modern Gentile nations, nor has the Church received a commission to establish Christ's kingdom through political domination. Philippians 3:20 declares, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The believer's heavenly position does not eliminate legitimate earthly duties, but it establishes where his ultimate citizenship and allegiance belong. The Church awaits the Lord Jesus Christ, whose coming for His people must be distinguished from His future visible return in power and glory. The prophetic Scriptures reveal the coming literal reign of Christ, not a gradual political achievement produced by the efforts of earthly governments. Daniel 2:44 declares that God will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and Revelation 11:15 announces that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. **The Millennium will not arrive because Christians finally elect enough politicians. It will arrive because the King Himself returns.**

The purpose of this series is not to teach Christians to hate government, worship government, or spend every waking hour fighting over government. It is to establish a biblical understanding of civil authority and the believer's responsibility beneath it. There are legitimate laws to obey, legitimate taxes to pay, legitimate officers to respect, and legitimate responsibilities associated with earthly citizenship. There are also wicked laws to challenge through proper means, corrupt officials to hold accountable, innocent people to defend, and situations in which obedience to God must take precedence over the commands of men. The Christian must possess enough discernment to recognize the difference. He should be able to support righteous law enforcement without excusing

abuse, honour military service without sanctifying every war, participate in public affairs without worshipping political parties, and expose wrongdoing without becoming dishonest himself. His conduct must remain governed by Scripture rather than by political anger or the emotional excitement of the crowd. **A Christian should not need a particular political party in power to remember how to obey God, and he should not need an election victory to remember that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

Every earthly government is temporary, every ruler is mortal, and every political system will eventually give way to the purposes of Almighty God. Pharaoh had his armies, Nebuchadnezzar had Babylon, Pilate had his judgment seat, and Rome possessed the machinery of an empire, but none of them could prevent the fulfillment of God's Word. The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified under earthly authority, buried, and raised again the third day according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven, and He will return according to the promises of God. Revelation 19:16 declares His title: “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” That is the authority before which every president, monarch, magistrate, general, and judge will eventually answer. Until that day, the Christian must live faithfully, preach the gospel, honour legitimate government, refuse wickedness, and remember that salvation is found exclusively through Jesus Christ by grace through faith. **Caesar may have his throne, his armies, his laws, and his appointed season of authority, but Caesar does not hold eternity in his hands. The Christian owes lawful submission to earthly government, but he owes his life, worship, obedience, and eternal allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. Respect the office, refuse the sin, preach the Word, and never forget Who sits above every throne.**

1 of 10 — The Christian and Government — Who Gave Caesar His Sword? God Ordained Government, Not Every Tyrant

Primary Scriptures: Romans 13:1–7; Daniel 2:21; Proverbs 29:2; John 19:10–11; 1 Peter 2:13–17.

Introduction

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). There it stands, written in plain English, without a footnote explaining how to escape it when the wrong political party wins an election. The apostle Paul did not say to submit only when the ruler is a Christian, the government is honest, the taxes are reasonable, or the laws happen to agree with your personal preferences. He wrote under the shadow of pagan Rome, where emperors were

not exactly conducting Wednesday night prayer meetings and consulting the King James Bible before signing legislation. Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost declared that civil authority exists by divine appointment. Before a Christian starts throwing around words like tyranny, rebellion, and revolution, he had better determine what God actually authorized government to do. A man who despises all authority is not necessarily courageous. Sometimes he is simply rebellious, and putting a Bible under his arm does not sanctify his rebellion.

On the other side stands another religious character who has swallowed Romans 13 so completely that he apparently forgot the rest of the Bible was printed. According to his peculiar theology, if the government issues an order, God must have approved it. Pharaoh commands the murder of Hebrew infants, Nebuchadnezzar demands worship of a golden image, Herod slaughters innocent children, and Pilate condemns the sinless Son of God, but apparently everybody should have saluted because the man giving the orders occupied an official government position. That is not biblical submission. That is spiritual blindness dressed in a government-issued uniform. The same God who ordained civil government also declared, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Proverbs 29:2). If every ruler were automatically righteous by virtue of holding office, that verse would make no sense whatsoever. God established government, but He never established wickedness as a virtue merely because somebody with a title practices it.

The Christian must therefore understand a distinction that ought to be obvious to anyone capable of reading two chapters of Scripture without losing his place: God ordains authority, but He does not approve every exercise of that authority. Civil government is necessary because fallen men are sinners, not because politicians are angels. The state possesses legitimate power to restrain wickedness, punish evildoers, protect innocent people, and preserve public order, but that authority is delegated, limited, and accountable to Almighty God. It is neither an independent kingdom beyond divine judgment nor a religious institution commissioned to save souls. This study will examine where civil authority originated, why God placed a sword in government's hand, what happens when wicked men occupy legitimate offices, and why a Christian must neither worship Caesar nor casually defy him. The Bible provides no shelter for the arrogant rebel who refuses lawful authority, and it offers no divine immunity to the tyrant who abuses it. Both men will eventually discover that there is a throne higher than theirs.

1. The Powers That Be Are Ordained of God

Romans 13 begins with a command, not a political suggestion. Paul writes, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.” The expression “every soul” does not leave much room

for the fellow who believes his temperament, intelligence, political opinions, or spiritual experience exempts him from civil responsibility. The command concerns human government, and the reason immediately follows: “For there is no power but of God.” The authority in view is not the independent sovereignty of men who somehow acquired power without God's knowledge. It is an institution operating under the providential government of the Creator. God established the family, gave order to His Church, and appointed civil government to exercise authority within its proper sphere. These institutions are not interchangeable, and none possesses unlimited jurisdiction. A governor cannot administer the Lord's supper by executive order, a pastor cannot issue criminal sentences from his pulpit, and a father cannot turn his household into an independent nation. Confusion begins when men refuse to recognize the boundaries God has established.

The immediate context deserves careful attention. Romans 12:19 commands believers, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Then Romans 13:4 describes the civil ruler as “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The connection is not accidental. God forbids private vengeance while recognizing the legitimate responsibility of established authorities to punish wrongdoing. A Christian whose property has been stolen is not authorized to appoint himself judge, jury, and executioner because he remembers an Old Testament account involving a sword. The government has a responsibility that private individuals do not possess. That distinction restrains personal retaliation and places public punishment within an accountable civil structure. Of course, sinners can corrupt that structure, but corruption does not erase the institution's legitimate purpose. A crooked judge does not prove that courts should never exist. He proves that judges need judgment too.

Paul continues, “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Romans 13:2). In this setting, the warning concerns resistance to civil authority and the judgment that follows such wrongdoing; it is not a declaration that a born-again believer loses eternal salvation because he violates a traffic law. Romans 8 has already established the believer's security in Christ, and Romans 13 does not overthrow it. The verse nevertheless carries a serious warning against lawless defiance. Christians are not permitted to transform personal stubbornness into a spiritual gift. The man who refuses to obey a legitimate law simply because nobody has the right to tell him anything may call himself independent, but Scripture has another word for his conduct. Biblical liberty never meant the absence of responsibility. The Christian's freedom in Jesus Christ does not place him above civil law; it obligates him to conduct himself with greater honesty and integrity beneath it.

2. Why God Put a Sword in Government's Hand

Romans 13:3 declares, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.” Verse 4 identifies the ruler as “the minister of God to thee for good,” adding that “he beareth not the sword in vain.” There is the divine purpose of civil authority in language clear enough to trouble both the anarchist and the corrupt politician. Government exists to restrain evil, not manufacture it. It is supposed to protect lawful conduct, punish criminal wrongdoing, and uphold public justice. The sword represents genuine coercive authority, including the power to impose punishment. It is not a decorative accessory issued to government officials so they can look impressive during ceremonies. A society without meaningful punishment invites wicked men to discover how much they can steal, destroy, and terrorize before somebody finally says enough. Remove the restraint of justice, and the criminal does not suddenly become a respectable gentleman. He generally becomes a criminal with improved working conditions.

The principle of accountability for violence reaches back before the establishment of Israel under Moses. In Genesis 9:6, God told Noah, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” Human life possesses sacred value because man was created in God's image, and the deliberate shedding of innocent blood is not a minor social inconvenience. This does not mean that every individual is free to administer punishment according to personal anger, nor does it excuse careless judgments or unjust executions. It establishes the gravity of murder and the necessity of accountability. Israel later received a detailed national judicial system under the law, but the moral foundation for restraining violence was already present. Government's responsibility to protect human life is not a modern political invention. A ruler who ignores violent wickedness while harassing peaceful citizens has reversed his assignment. God gave him the sword to restrain evildoers, not to make respectable people afraid of righteousness.

Peter confirms the same principle in 1 Peter 2:14, describing governors as those sent “for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” Notice both responsibilities. Government must punish genuine wrongdoing and provide room for lawful conduct to flourish. The policeman who protects a family, the judge who administers honest judgment, and the public official who refuses a bribe may perform duties consistent with God's appointed purpose for civil authority. Yet the ruler who protects criminals, punishes innocent people, or sells justice to the highest bidder contradicts that purpose. Romans 13 describes what government is ordained to accomplish; it does not establish that every governmental action automatically accomplishes it. A dishonest mechanic does not change the purpose of a wrench, and a crooked magistrate does not change the

purpose of civil justice. The instrument can be misused without losing the reason for which it was entrusted. The sword belongs to an office of responsibility, not to an unlimited privilege of personal domination.

3. God Raises Up Kings, but He Also Knocks Them Down

Daniel 2:21 declares, “And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings.” That verse ought to ruin the afternoon of any ruler who imagines his position places him beyond divine supervision. God is not pacing heaven waiting for election returns to discover who will occupy the next earthly throne. He governs the rise and fall of nations according to His purposes, even when those nations have no intention of acknowledging Him. Daniel spoke in the context of Babylonian power, where Nebuchadnezzar possessed tremendous earthly authority. Yet the prophet did not confuse the greatness of Babylon with the righteousness of its king. The distinction matters. Divine sovereignty over the appointment and removal of rulers does not amount to divine approval of every action performed during their administrations. God can use a wicked nation as an instrument of judgment and afterward judge that same nation for its own wickedness. Providence is not a certificate of innocence.

Nebuchadnezzar provides a memorable demonstration. In Daniel 4:30, the king boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” That speech was apparently impressive to the man delivering it, but heaven was not applauding. Before the boast had settled, divine judgment interrupted his royal performance. The king who gloried in his magnificent empire was humbled until he learned “that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:17). God did not need a constitutional amendment, a parliamentary vote, or a committee of royal advisers to bring him down. The Almighty simply reminded a proud monarch that borrowed authority is still borrowed authority. A crown may impress the crowd, but it does not impress the One who made the head wearing it.

Consider Pharaoh in Exodus. He possessed a legitimate position of governmental authority over Egypt, but that position did not make his command to murder Hebrew children righteous. Exodus 1:17 declares, “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.” Their fear of God took precedence over Pharaoh's murderous order. The narrative does not establish that citizens may disregard every inconvenient Egyptian regulation. It establishes that no ruler may lawfully require obedience to a command directly contrary to God's righteousness. The same pattern appears throughout Scripture. God may permit a ruler to occupy office, confront that ruler through His servants, expose the ruler's wickedness, and eventually

remove him. Proverbs 29:2 does not say the people rejoice whenever anybody happens to occupy authority. It says they rejoice when the righteous govern and mourn when the wicked rule. The throne is an institution; righteousness is a moral condition. Confusing the two is how men begin treating political authority as though it were a substitute for holiness.

4. Pilate Had Authority, but He Still Condemned an Innocent Man

John 19 brings the question of governmental authority directly before the Lord Jesus Christ. Pilate asked Him, “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10). There stood the Roman governor, speaking with all the confidence of a man whose office possessed the power of life and death. Before him stood the sinless Son of God, bound and accused, yet possessing infinitely greater authority than the man conducting the interrogation. The contrast is remarkable. Pilate could order soldiers to carry out a sentence, but he could not command one heartbeat without God's permission. He had a judicial position, an armed government, and the machinery of Roman punishment behind him. Christ had the authority of heaven. One man controlled the courtroom; the Other sustained the universe. Political arrogance looks rather small when viewed from that angle.

Jesus answered, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11). Those words establish both the source of Pilate's authority and his moral accountability. His power had been permitted from above, but that did not make his conduct righteous. The Lord's reference to the “greater sin” of the one who delivered Him indicates degrees of guilt, not the innocence of the governor who misused his authority. Pilate had already declared, “I find no fault in him” (John 19:6), yet he ultimately delivered the innocent Christ to be crucified. There is the perfect answer to the claim that Romans 13 requires Christians to regard every governmental decision as just. Pilate possessed real authority and committed real wickedness through its exercise. The legitimacy of his office did not erase the guilt of his decision. Governmental power can be lawful in origin and criminal in application.

Neither does Christ's submission to the events of His crucifixion mean that every Christian must surrender all legitimate legal protections whenever accused unjustly. His suffering fulfilled the Scriptures and accomplished redemption, a work no believer can repeat. In Acts 16:37, Paul challenged the unlawful treatment he and Silas had received, declaring that the magistrates had beaten them openly and uncondemned, being Romans. In Acts 25:11, he exercised his right of appeal unto Caesar. These examples show that respect for civil authority and the lawful challenge of its misconduct are not contradictory. A Christian may appeal a ruling, expose a violation of law, demand fair treatment, and use legitimate

remedies without declaring war against government itself. Submission does not mean volunteering to help an unjust official conceal his wrongdoing. Pilate's judgment seat teaches that the state possesses real power, but possessing power is not the same thing as possessing truth. The courtroom can condemn an innocent man, but it cannot make him guilty before God.

5. Israel's Theocracy Is Not the Church's Commission

A tremendous amount of political confusion comes from men who cannot distinguish Israel under the law from the Church under grace. God brought Israel out of Egypt, established a national covenant with that people, gave them a land, appointed civil and religious responsibilities, and eventually permitted them to have kings. In Deuteronomy 17:18–20, Israel's king was instructed to write a copy of the law, read it, fear the LORD, and avoid lifting up his heart above his brethren. That was not a general commission authorizing every future Gentile nation to declare itself a replacement Israel. It was part of God's specific governmental arrangement with His covenant people. Israel's national legislation, priesthood, land inheritance, and kingdom promises belonged to their appointed biblical setting. A modern politician cannot borrow David's crown, attach a national flag to it, and announce that his country has inherited Israel's covenant. Changing the stationery does not change the dispensation.

The New Testament Church has a different calling. Jesus Christ declared in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.” The Lord was not denying His future earthly reign, clearly revealed in prophecy, but identifying the character and source of His kingdom in that encounter. The Church is commissioned to preach the gospel, make disciples, edify believers, and stand as a witness to the truth of God. Second Corinthians 5:20 identifies believers as ambassadors for Christ, and Philippians 3:20 declares, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” An ambassador represents the country that sent him. He may conduct himself responsibly in the nation where he serves, but he does not forget whom he represents. The Church loses its testimony when it trades the gospel for a political campaign and mistakes governmental influence for spiritual power.

This distinction does not require Christians to despise their country, abandon lawful citizenship, or remain silent about wickedness. Paul used his Roman citizenship when appropriate, and Scripture repeatedly teaches the importance of justice, truth, and honest conduct. Christians may serve in legitimate public offices, vote according to conscience, oppose unjust laws, and seek the welfare of their communities. What they must not do is confuse those earthly responsibilities with the salvation of souls or the establishment of Christ's promised kingdom. The United States is not Israel, a political party is not the body

of Christ, and an election victory is not the Second Advent. A nation may write biblical language on its monuments while disregarding the Book in its conduct. That contradiction is not cured by adding another religious slogan to a campaign advertisement. The government's lawful responsibility is civil order and justice; the Church's commission is the gospel and the ministry of the Word. When either institution attempts to become the other, biblical order gives way to religious and political confusion.

6. Submission Does Not Disappear When Your Candidate Loses

Romans 13:5 declares, “Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” Notice that Paul places Christian submission upon a higher foundation than fear of punishment. A lost man may obey a law because he does not want to pay a fine, spend a night in jail, or explain himself before a judge. A believer has an additional reason: he desires to obey the God who established lawful authority. Conscience informed by Scripture recognizes obligations that personal convenience might prefer to ignore. The Christian who respects civil law only when his preferred political party holds office has made party loyalty the controlling principle of his obedience. That is a poor substitute for the Bible. God did not suspend Romans 13 until the next favorable election. A lawful obligation does not become optional because the man enforcing it has a different political opinion, wears the wrong campaign button, or delivers speeches that make your teeth hurt.

Romans 13:6–7 applies this teaching to taxation and public obligations: “For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.” Paul continues, “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.” There is no promise that every tax will be reasonable, every agency efficient, or every official deserving of personal admiration. The instruction concerns legitimate obligations, not an endorsement of governmental waste or dishonesty. A Christian may oppose oppressive taxes, challenge wrongful assessments, and advocate for reform through lawful means. He may not justify lying about his income simply because he dislikes the way public money is spent. Two wrongs do not suddenly become righteousness when the second wrong is committed by a man carrying a Bible. An honest Christian should not need a government investigator to persuade him that dishonesty remains a sin.

Peter adds another necessary distinction in 1 Peter 2:17: “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” There are four commands, and their arrangement deserves attention. The Christian is commanded to honour the king, but the fear reserved in this verse is directed toward God. Respect is owed to civil authority; worship belongs to the Almighty. That means believers can speak respectfully about public office without

flattering wicked officeholders or pretending their decisions are beyond criticism. Titus 3:1 likewise instructs believers “to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.” These commands should influence the believer's speech, conduct, and public testimony. The Christian who claims to love biblical authority but behaves like an uncontrolled rebel whenever government irritates him has a contradiction worth examining. You cannot defend the authority of Scripture by habitually despising one of the institutions Scripture commands you to respect.

7. Caesar's Authority Ends Where God's Commandments Begin

The clearest boundary of civil submission appears in Acts 5:29: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” The apostles were not objecting to an unpopular tax, an inconvenient public regulation, or the personality of a government official. They had been commanded to stop proclaiming Jesus Christ, directly contradicting the commission they received from their risen Lord. Their refusal was therefore grounded in an unmistakable conflict between divine commandment and human prohibition. Acts 4:19 had already framed the issue: “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” There is a tremendous difference between disobeying because government commands wickedness and disobeying because government commands something inconvenient. A man who quotes Peter to excuse ordinary lawlessness is not following the apostle's example. He is borrowing an apostle's words to decorate his own stubbornness.

The Old Testament supplies equally unmistakable examples, provided their historical settings are respected. The Hebrew midwives refused Pharaoh's murderous instructions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused Nebuchadnezzar's demand to worship an image, declaring in Daniel 3:18, “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” Daniel continued praying when a royal decree made his faithful practice unlawful. These were not men hunting for an opportunity to insult public authority. They were servants of God placed in situations where compliance meant direct disobedience to Him. The passages demonstrate a moral boundary that survives every change of empire and administration. A government may regulate ordinary civil affairs within its lawful authority, but it cannot turn idolatry into righteousness, make murder innocent, or cancel an obligation imposed by Almighty God. Caesar may issue decrees, but he does not possess authority to amend the Ten Commandments.

The proper response to such commands must also remain biblical. These servants did not turn every disagreement into an armed uprising, and the apostles did not abandon their testimony to organize criminal retaliation. They refused what contradicted God's

commands and accepted that earthly authorities might punish their faithfulness. Their courage was measured by obedience, not by the amount of destruction they could cause. Christians today must distinguish a genuine command to sin from a policy they dislike, a violation of scriptural duty from an inconvenience, and faithful resistance from political theater. The Bible does not authorize unlawful violence merely because a believer has convinced himself that every official is a tyrant. Neither does it require compliance when government directly commands wickedness. These boundaries demand careful judgment, clear Scripture, and genuine conviction rather than the excitement of joining a crowd. When civil authority remains within its proper jurisdiction, the Christian should obey. When it commands disobedience to God, the Christian must stand upon the higher authority of His Word.

Conclusion

The question was simple: Who gave Caesar his sword? The answer is Almighty God. Romans 13 establishes that civil government possesses legitimate authority, and the Christian has a corresponding responsibility to respect that authority. But the same Bible identifies the purpose for which the sword was given, exposes the wickedness of rulers who misuse their offices, and reminds every earthly government that its power remains subject to divine judgment. Daniel's account of Nebuchadnezzar proves that God can humble the mightiest monarch. Pharaoh's murderous command proves that an official order does not automatically become righteous. Pilate's condemnation of Jesus Christ proves that legitimate judicial authority can be employed to commit a terrible injustice. Peter's instructions establish the believer's responsibility to honour the king, while the apostles' testimony in Acts 5 establishes the supremacy of obedience to God. These passages belong together. Remove one, and the doctrine becomes distorted. Respect without discernment becomes servitude to wickedness; resistance without biblical restraint becomes rebellion masquerading as courage.

The believer must therefore reject both the religious anarchist and the political idolater. The first man despises government whenever it interferes with his desires, while the second practically worships governmental power whenever his preferred rulers possess it. Neither position can survive a serious examination of Scripture. The Christian should respect lawful authority, pay legitimate obligations, honour public office, pray for rulers, support righteous judgment, and refuse participation in governmental corruption. He may lawfully criticize public policy, appeal an unjust decision, expose proven misconduct, and advocate for correction without treating every disagreement as a declaration of war. His faithfulness does not depend upon having a Christian president, a sympathetic governor, or an administration willing to praise his convictions. His responsibility is to obey the Lord

regardless of which earthly ruler occupies office. The Christian does not need to become Caesar's enemy to remain God's servant, but he must never become Caesar's servant at the expense of obedience to God.

Every ruler ought to remember that he occupies a temporary office beneath an eternal throne. Every Christian ought to remember that submission to legitimate government is part of biblical obedience, not an optional courtesy extended whenever circumstances are pleasant. The president may command within his lawful authority, the judge may render sentences within his jurisdiction, and the magistrate may enforce statutes entrusted to his office. But none of them can forgive sins, change the Word of God, purchase eternal life, or escape the final judgment of Jesus Christ. The Christian's ultimate allegiance belongs to the Lord who saved him by grace through faith, not to the government beneath which he presently lives. One day every earthly officeholder will surrender his position, every national administration will become history, and every earthly crown will prove temporary. The One who reigns above them all will remain. **God gave Caesar a sword to restrain evil, not a throne from which to overrule heaven. Honour the authority God established, refuse the wickedness God condemned, and never mistake the man holding the sword for the God who gave him permission to carry it.**

2 of 10 — The Christian and Government — Render Unto Caesar: Taxes, Laws, and the Christian Who Wants a Free Pass

Primary Scriptures: Matthew 22:15–22; Romans 13:6–7; Matthew 17:24–27; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Peter 2:13–16.

Introduction

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:21). There is enough truth in that one sentence to straighten out a considerable number of Christians who have somehow concluded that being saved by grace means being exempt from civil responsibility. Some folks want paved highways, functioning hospitals, police protection, fire departments, courts, national defense, and every other benefit of an orderly society, but the moment a tax bill arrives, they suddenly discover a burning interest in civil disobedience. They will quote Acts 5:29 with tremendous enthusiasm, as though Peter had been arrested for refusing to register his automobile. The Lord Jesus Christ was not preaching tax evasion when He answered the Pharisees. He established a distinction between legitimate earthly obligations and the supreme authority of Almighty God. Caesar had certain claims, but Caesar was not God. That distinction

corrects both the lawless Christian and the politician who thinks the entire human race belongs to the government.

There is an opposite error that deserves just as much attention. Some religious teachers have taken Christ's words and turned them into a blank check for governmental power. According to that interpretation, whatever Caesar demands must be surrendered without question, whether it concerns money, property, worship, conscience, or obedience to Scripture. Evidently, once a government official attaches a regulation number to an order, the Almighty is expected to surrender His jurisdiction. That is nonsense. The Lord did not say to render unto Caesar everything Caesar asks for. He said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. Those are two distinct claims, and neither may swallow the other. The government has authority to collect lawful revenue and administer civil responsibilities, but it does not possess ownership of the Christian's soul. A tax collector may have a legitimate claim upon a portion of one's earnings, but he has no authority to collect one's worship.

The Christian's responsibility is neither absolute submission to every governmental demand nor automatic rebellion against every civil inconvenience. The Scriptures establish a far more demanding standard: obey legitimate authority, maintain personal honesty, fulfill lawful obligations, oppose genuine injustice through righteous means, and refuse compliance whenever men directly command disobedience to God. That standard exposes the fellow who cheats on his taxes while boasting about his Christian testimony, and it also exposes the ruler who uses governmental authority to disguise oppression. The believer must distinguish lawful resistance from dishonesty, genuine persecution from personal irritation, and Christian liberty from stubborn rebellion. The principles established by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22, reinforced by Paul in Romans 13, and applied by Peter in his first epistle leave little room for political excuses. A Christian who wants the privileges of an orderly society without accepting its legitimate responsibilities has misunderstood liberty. And a government that demands what belongs exclusively to God has misunderstood authority.

1. The Pharisees Set a Trap, and Jesus Asked for a Penny

Matthew 22:15 records, “Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.” Notice their purpose. They were not seeking biblical instruction concerning taxation, government, or the proper relationship between earthly citizenship and divine authority. They were looking for something they could use against the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 16 reveals that they sent their disciples with the Herodians, a particularly revealing arrangement considering the political and religious tensions surrounding Roman rule. They approached Christ with flattering language, declaring that He was true and

taught the way of God in truth. Imagine that! Men who were plotting to destroy Him suddenly became enthusiastic admirers of His honesty. Religious hypocrisy has always known how to dress itself for church. They followed their flattering introduction with the question, “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Matthew 22:17). They wanted an answer that could be turned into an accusation. The question concerned taxation, but the real business was entrapment.

The trap was designed to force Christ into a politically dangerous position. If He rejected tribute to Caesar, His enemies could portray Him as an opponent of Roman authority. If He endorsed tribute without qualification, they hoped to turn the Jewish people against Him under the burden of foreign rule. But the Son of God was not going to be manipulated by a collection of religious schemers who thought they could outwit their Creator. Matthew 22:18 declares, “But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?” There is a lesson worth learning before going any farther. Christ did not mistake flattering language for sincerity, nor did He surrender the truth merely because the question carried political consequences. He recognized the wicked motive beneath the religious performance. A smooth introduction does not sanctify a dishonest question. Sometimes the man who claims to be searching for truth is merely searching for a sentence he can twist.

The Lord then commanded, “Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny” (Matthew 22:19). He asked whose image and superscription appeared upon the coin, and they answered, “Caesar's.” Then came the statement that demolished their scheme: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.” Christ acknowledged a legitimate sphere of earthly governmental obligation without surrendering God's superior claim. His answer was given during His earthly ministry to Israel, before His crucifixion and resurrection, and must be understood within that historical setting. Nevertheless, the principle is reinforced in the epistles addressed to believers under grace. The Christian is not instructed to establish Israel's national government, but neither is he permitted to despise legitimate civil authority. The Pharisees wanted a political slogan they could weaponize. Christ gave them a divine principle they could not overthrow. Matthew records that they marvelled, left Him, and went their way. The men who came to trap the Lord departed with their trap empty.

2. Caesar's Image Was on the Coin, but God's Image Was on Man

The Lord's question concerning the image and superscription on the coin was not an accidental detail. The money circulating under Roman authority bore the identifying marks of that earthly government. Christ used the coin itself to expose the distinction His enemies were attempting to erase. Caesar could possess a legitimate financial claim

within the political system, but that did not make Caesar the rightful owner of everything under heaven. The wording is precise: “the things which are Caesar's” and “the things that are God's.” The Lord did not give Caesar first claim upon God, nor did He permit God's authority to be reduced to a private religious preference. There are earthly obligations belonging to civil government and spiritual obligations that no government can legitimately demand for itself. A man who refuses to distinguish those responsibilities will eventually make one of two mistakes: he will either despise lawful government or exalt government into a position reserved for the Almighty.

There is another biblical truth that sharpens the distinction. Genesis 1:27 declares, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” The coin in Matthew 22 bore Caesar's image, but the human beings arguing about that coin had been created in God's image. That does not make the two passages identical in subject, but it certainly provides a powerful comparison. Caesar may place his likeness upon currency, yet he did not manufacture the souls of the citizens carrying it. He did not create their conscience, establish their eternal destiny, or acquire authority to command their worship. A government may stamp an emperor's face upon every coin in the treasury, but it cannot stamp its ownership upon the human soul. The Christian must understand the difference between rendering lawful material obligations and surrendering spiritual allegiance. Money may pass through Caesar's treasury; worship belongs at God's throne.

This distinction also exposes the foolishness of treating every tax as an attack upon Christianity. If paying tribute were inherently sinful, the Lord would not have answered as He did. His statement recognizes that certain civil obligations are legitimate, even under a government that does not worship the true God. At the same time, the passage does not justify unlimited taxation, confiscation, or governmental domination merely because Caesar's image happens to be printed on the money. The question is not whether the government can demand anything it wants; the question is what properly falls within its lawful authority. Christians may debate taxation, question public expenditures, and oppose unjust demands without denying Christ's command. What they cannot do is pretend that their personal dislike of a policy automatically cancels every biblical duty associated with civil citizenship. The coin in Caesar's hand does not make Caesar God, but neither does the Bible in a Christian's hand make dishonesty holy.

3. The Son of God Paid Tribute Without Surrendering His Rights

Matthew 17:24–27 provides another remarkable encounter involving tribute, though its setting must not be confused with the Roman taxation question in Matthew 22. Here the collectors of tribute money approached Peter and asked, “Doth not your master pay

tribute?" Peter answered that He did. When Peter entered the house, Jesus anticipated the matter and asked whether earthly kings collected custom or tribute from their own children or from strangers. Peter answered, "Of strangers." The Lord replied, "Then are the children free." The immediate matter concerned tribute associated with the religious obligations of Israel, not the identical Roman civil tax discussed later. That distinction matters because Jesus was establishing a truth concerning His unique position as the Son. He was not delivering a general declaration that every Christian who calls himself a child of God is exempt from all government taxation.

Notice what happened next. Although Christ established His rightful freedom, He continued, "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them," and instructed Peter to obtain the required money through the remarkable miracle involving a fish. The first fish Peter caught would contain a piece of money, which was to be given "for me and thee" (Matthew 17:27). The Lord who possessed authority over creation provided the payment without difficulty. He did not need to rob a treasury, deceive a collector, or organize a demonstration to prove He was free. His decision to pay did not erase His rights; it demonstrated that legitimate freedom need not be paraded before every person demanding an explanation. There is a difference between possessing a right and insisting upon exercising it in every circumstance. The Christian who cannot distinguish those things may spend his entire life fighting battles the Lord never commanded him to fight.

The application is particularly important for believers who imagine that refusing every ordinary obligation somehow proves their devotion to God. Christ knew exactly who He was, understood the distinction between His position and the claim being made, and nevertheless chose a course that avoided unnecessary offense. That is not cowardice. It is wisdom governed by righteousness. The passage must not be twisted into a command to comply with wickedness merely to avoid disagreement, for the Lord never required His servants to purchase peace at the expense of obedience to God. But neither does the Bible endorse the fellow who turns every small inconvenience into a heroic confrontation. Some men cannot endure a disputed fee without announcing that they are standing where Daniel stood before the lions. Daniel was praying in obedience to God under a royal prohibition; your disagreement with a payment notice may require a telephone call and an appeal form. Spiritual maturity includes knowing the difference.

4. Romans 13 Does Not Exempt Christians From Paying Taxes

Paul settles the ordinary responsibility of taxation in Romans 13:6–7: "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Those words were addressed to believers

living under Roman civil authority, not to Israelites administering their own theocracy under Moses. The distinction is important. Paul was not instructing the Church to collect Israel's agricultural tithes or establish a national priesthood. He was explaining the practical obligations of Christians living under existing governmental institutions. The state had legitimate responsibilities, and citizens were obligated to meet their lawful dues. The apostle did not add a convenient exception for people who considered themselves unusually spiritual. Salvation by grace through faith changes a man's standing before God; it does not magically cancel his lawful obligations to society.

There is nothing particularly spiritual about lying on a tax return, concealing taxable income, inventing business expenses, forging documents, or making fraudulent claims to avoid money legally owed. Proverbs 11:1 declares, “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.” Although that proverb speaks directly to dishonest measurement, its moral principle exposes deception in commercial and financial dealings. Ephesians 4:25 commands, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.” Those words do not become optional when the neighbor happens to work for a government agency. A Christian may claim lawful deductions, arrange financial affairs within the law, challenge an incorrect assessment, and seek every legitimate protection available to him. None of that is dishonest. But knowingly falsifying information is another matter entirely. A man who steals through deception has not defeated governmental corruption; he has merely added another dishonest person to the financial records.

The same principle applies to business owners, employers, contractors, and workers who handle financial obligations affecting other people. A Christian businessman should not collect money designated for taxes and then treat it as his personal property. He should not pay workers dishonestly, hide transactions through fraudulent records, or claim the name of Jesus Christ as a convenient advertisement while practicing financial deception behind the office door. Colossians 3:23 commands, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” That includes the work performed when nobody from the church is watching. The man who boasts about biblical integrity on Sunday and manufactures false invoices on Monday needs more than a better accountant. He needs to obey the Book he claims to believe. Christian testimony is not merely what a man says while standing behind a pulpit. It includes what he signs, reports, collects, and pays when money is involved.

5. Christian Liberty Is Not a Cloak for Lawlessness

Peter speaks directly to the relationship between Christian freedom and civil submission in 1 Peter 2:13–16. He commands believers, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,” and identifies kings and governors as authorities responsible for punishing

evildoers and praising those who do well. Then verse 16 delivers a warning that many modern Christians desperately need: “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” There is the answer to the fellow who believes Christian liberty means he can do whatever he pleases and attach a religious explanation afterward. Freedom in Christ is not a disguise for wickedness. It does not excuse dishonesty, contempt, deliberate provocation, or disregard for legitimate authority. The Christian has been liberated from sin's dominion, not commissioned to become a public nuisance. A liberty that must be defended by deception is already wearing the wrong uniform.

Titus 3:1–2 reinforces that truth: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.” Paul did not write those instructions because every public official possessed admirable character. He wrote them because believers are responsible for their conduct regardless of the spiritual condition of those governing them. The Christian may expose wrongdoing, criticize unjust policies, and defend biblical truth without becoming a habitual brawler. Strong conviction does not require filthy language, threats, invented accusations, or personal cruelty. Some professing believers can quote half a chapter about spiritual warfare while conducting themselves like an angry man fighting over the last parking space. That is not courage. Biblical meekness is not surrender to falsehood; it is strength under the control of righteousness.

Ordinary regulations must therefore be examined with sober judgment rather than immediate suspicion. Governments establish rules concerning traffic, construction, public safety, business operations, property, and countless other matters necessary to orderly civil life. Some regulations may be excessive, poorly designed, inconsistent, or unjustly applied, and Christians are free to pursue lawful correction. But the mere existence of a rule does not establish persecution. A traffic light is not an attack upon religious liberty because it interferes with someone's schedule. A legitimate safety requirement does not become an offense against Christianity because compliance costs money. The believer must determine whether a regulation actually requires disobedience to God or merely requires him to do something he would rather avoid. There is an enormous difference. Scripture does not command Christians to celebrate every government regulation, but it certainly does not authorize them to treat personal irritation as though it were a revelation from heaven.

6. When Government Becomes Oppressive, God Does Not Call It Righteous

The obligation to pay legitimate taxes does not mean every tax is fair, every collection method honest, or every governmental expenditure justified. Scripture contains severe

warnings against rulers who misuse power and exploit those beneath them. Isaiah 10:1–2 declares, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people.” Those words were spoken in the prophetic setting of Israel's national wickedness, and they must not be lifted out of their covenant context as though every modern nation occupied Israel's position. Nevertheless, the condemnation of unjust decrees reveals God's hatred of oppression. Civil officials are not entitled to call injustice righteousness merely because it was approved by a legislative majority. A law can be legally enacted and morally wicked. Government has no divine permission to turn public office into a machine for crushing those it was established to protect.

Luke 3:12–13 gives another revealing example. Publicans came to John the Baptist asking what they should do, and he answered, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” Notice that John did not command every tax collector to abandon his occupation. He condemned dishonest exaction. The problem was not the mere collection of public revenue but the abuse of authority to take more than was properly required. In Luke 19, Zacchaeus provides a further illustration of repentance producing honest conduct. He declared that if he had taken anything from any man by false accusation, he would restore him fourfold. Restitution did not purchase salvation, and the Church must never turn an account from Christ's earthly ministry into salvation by works. The incident nevertheless demonstrates that genuine dealings with God do not leave dishonest financial practices untouched. A publican can be a sinner, a government official can be a thief, and a financial transaction can be wicked even when someone produces official paperwork.

What, then, should Christians do when taxation becomes oppressive or governmental demands exceed proper authority? The answer is neither blind submission to every abuse nor an immediate declaration of lawless rebellion. Believers may challenge assessments, petition elected officials, seek judicial review, organize peaceful lawful opposition, expose documented corruption, and advocate for changes to unjust policies. Paul himself used legal protections available through Roman citizenship, demonstrating that appealing to established rights does not contradict biblical submission. Acts 25:11 records his statement, “I appeal unto Caesar.” A lawful challenge is not automatically rebellion, and an official decision is not automatically righteous simply because government made it. Yet opposition must remain truthful. The Christian who protests dishonesty through dishonest means has not defended righteousness. He has merely changed the name on the accusation. Government must answer to God for oppressive demands, and citizens must answer to God for their response. Neither party receives permission to commit wickedness because the other party committed it first.

7. When Caesar Crosses God's Line, Obedience Takes a Higher Road

Acts 5:29 establishes the ultimate boundary of human authority: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” That declaration was made when the apostles faced a direct command to stop preaching the Lord Jesus Christ. The authorities had forbidden what God commanded, and obedience to the government would have required disobedience to God. That is the dividing line. The Christian's obligation to obey legitimate civil authority never includes a duty to commit sin at the government's request. If a ruler commands idolatry, demands the murder of innocent people, prohibits obedience to a clear divine command, or requires conduct directly contrary to Scripture, the believer must obey the higher authority. Yet Acts 5 cannot honestly be used to justify every personal dispute over taxation or regulation. Peter was defending the proclamation of Jesus Christ, not teaching Christians how to avoid paying money they lawfully owed. Turning apostolic courage into an excuse for ordinary dishonesty is a poor way to honor the apostles.

Consider the contrast between Daniel and the man who refuses to obey an ordinary law because he dislikes government. Daniel 6 records a royal decree designed to prevent prayer to anyone except the king. Daniel continued praying to God because the decree directly conflicted with his established faithfulness to the Lord. The three Hebrew children in Daniel 3 refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image because idolatry could not be made righteous by royal command. The Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1 refused Pharaoh's order to destroy innocent children. These accounts establish genuine conflicts between human commands and divine obligations. They do not authorize believers to create additional commandments from personal preferences. The Christian must prove his position from Scripture, not merely from anger. If the government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, resistance is required. If the government establishes an ordinary lawful obligation that does neither, the believer cannot manufacture a biblical exemption simply because compliance is inconvenient.

The proper attitude toward government must remain biblical even when resistance becomes necessary. Peter commanded, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:17). The order is instructive. The believer fears God and honours the king; he does not reverse those obligations. He may refuse a command that violates Scripture while still refusing to lie, threaten, slander, or act maliciously toward those in authority. He may use legitimate legal remedies, accept the possibility of consequences, and continue his Christian testimony without confusing spiritual courage with uncontrolled hostility. Governmental persecution does not make retaliation righteous, and governmental abuse does not make every citizen's response holy. The Christian is not called to worship the state, but neither is he called to spend his life hunting for opportunities to defy it. His

duty is faithful obedience to Almighty God, including submission to civil authority wherever that submission does not require sin. Caesar may govern earthly affairs within his proper jurisdiction, but he has no authority to rewrite the commandments of heaven.

Conclusion

The Lord Jesus Christ answered the question concerning tribute with a distinction that still exposes political and religious foolishness: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.” That command leaves no room for the dishonest Christian who demands all the benefits of civil order while deliberately escaping his lawful responsibilities. Neither does it provide an excuse for governmental authorities who imagine that holding office gives them ownership of everything beneath their jurisdiction. Romans 13 commands believers to fulfill legitimate civil obligations, including taxation. Matthew 17 demonstrates that the Lord Himself could exercise rightful freedom without manufacturing needless offense. Titus 3 requires submission to magistrates and honorable public conduct. First Peter 2 forbids using Christian liberty as a cloak for maliciousness. These passages form a consistent biblical witness. The believer should be honest when paying taxes, responsible when conducting business, respectful when dealing with officials, and discerning when confronting genuine wrongdoing. Christian liberty is not a permission slip for rebellion, and governmental authority is not a permission slip for oppression.

The same Christian who refuses to cheat the government must also refuse to worship it. Paying taxes does not require approval of every expenditure, obeying laws does not require pretending every statute is just, and honouring public office does not require defending corruption. Believers may question excessive taxation, oppose dishonest collection methods, demand accountability, and pursue legitimate correction through lawful means. But they must never compromise their own righteousness while condemning another man's wickedness. A Christian who falsifies financial records to protest governmental dishonesty has turned his protest into an illustration of the problem. A Christian who slanders an official while demanding justice has forgotten that truth belongs on both sides of the argument. The Bible does not permit believers to become crooks in order to defeat crooks. The Lord who commands righteousness in government also demands righteousness from the people governed. If a man cannot be trusted to tell the truth about a dollar, his loud declarations about defending biblical liberty deserve careful examination.

One day every tax collector, magistrate, governor, legislator, and ruler will surrender his earthly office and stand before the God who established the boundaries of legitimate authority. The believer must remember that his earthly citizenship is temporary, but his position in Jesus Christ is eternal. Philippians 3:20 declares, “For our conversation is in

heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." That heavenly citizenship does not cancel lawful responsibilities on earth; it places them beneath a higher allegiance. Pay what is properly owed. Tell the truth when money is involved. Use lawful means to oppose genuine injustice. Refuse to participate in wickedness, whether it comes from a private citizen or a public official. Honour the office without making an idol of its occupant. And never surrender to Caesar what belongs exclusively to Almighty God. **The Christian who uses grace as an excuse to cheat Caesar has misunderstood liberty, and the Caesar who uses government as an excuse to command God's people to sin has misunderstood authority. Pay the legitimate bill, refuse the unlawful command, and remember that the man whose image appears on the coin is not the God before whom every soul must eventually give account.**

3 of 10 — The Christian and Government — The Badge, the Bench, and the Sword: When Justice Serves God and When It Becomes Corruption

Primary Scriptures: Romans 13:3–4; Proverbs 17:15; Proverbs 21:15; Isaiah 10:1–2; Luke 3:14; 1 Peter 2:14.

Introduction

"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good" (Romans 13:3–4). There stands the biblical purpose of civil government, written plainly enough that a man should not need a committee of constitutional scholars to discover it. Government is supposed to make the criminal afraid, not the innocent citizen. It is supposed to restrain wickedness, punish wrongdoing, and protect those who conduct themselves lawfully. Yet we live in a world where some people believe every police officer is an oppressor, while others act as though a man becomes incapable of wrongdoing the moment somebody pins a badge upon his chest. Both positions require a considerable amount of ignorance and very little Bible. God ordained civil authority, but He never declared that every man exercising it would be honest, every judgment would be righteous, or every government-issued command would be morally defensible.

The apostle continues, "But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4). That sword represents something more substantial than a ceremonial decoration carried by a public official who enjoys hearing himself addressed by

his title. Civil government possesses legitimate authority to enforce laws, restrain dangerous wrongdoing, and administer punishment. There is nothing inherently unchristian about a police officer arresting a criminal, a judge sentencing a convicted offender, or a correctional officer maintaining lawful custody. But the same Bible that recognizes governmental power also condemns those who pervert judgment, accept bribes, bear false witness, oppress the innocent, and use authority for personal advantage. A badge does not change a sinner's nature, and a judicial robe does not transform wickedness into righteousness. God may authorize an office without approving the conduct of every man who occupies it.

The Christian must therefore reject two equally dangerous errors. One error despises legitimate law enforcement, treats criminals as victims merely because they have been arrested, and imagines that public order can survive without meaningful consequences for wrongdoing. The other error defends every official action simply because the person responsible wears a uniform, holds a government commission, or occupies a judicial bench. Neither extreme is supported by Scripture. The Bible establishes the righteous purpose of civil authority while demanding accountability from those entrusted with its exercise. This study will examine the sword God placed in government's hand, the responsibility of those who carry it, the corruption that follows when justice is sold or manipulated, and the Christian's obligation to distinguish lawful punishment from oppression. Government is not righteous merely because it possesses power. Government serves its appointed purpose when that power is exercised according to justice. When the sword intended to restrain wickedness is turned against the innocent, the problem is not insufficient authority. The problem is authority corrupted by sin.

1. God Gave Government a Sword, Not a Decorative Letter Opener

Romans 13:4 identifies the civil ruler as “the minister of God to thee for good.” Notice that Paul calls him a minister, but not a minister of the gospel. His appointment concerns civil authority and the restraint of wrongdoing, not the preaching of salvation or the administration of spiritual ordinances. The same God who commissioned the Church to proclaim the gospel also established government to preserve civil order within a fallen world. Those assignments must not be confused. A policeman cannot regenerate a sinner by arresting him, and a preacher cannot discharge the responsibilities of criminal justice merely by delivering a sermon against theft. One institution deals with civil wrongdoing through lawful authority; the other proclaims reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Both have responsibilities, but neither should pretend to possess the other's commission. If every sinner needed nothing more than an arrest warrant, the Lord would not have

commanded the preaching of the gospel. If every criminal needed nothing more than a sermon, there would be little reason for Romans 13 to mention a sword.

The origin of governmental responsibility for restraining violence reaches back beyond the Mosaic law. After the flood, God declared in Genesis 9:6, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” That command was given to Noah in a setting preceding the establishment of Israel as a nation. It demonstrates the seriousness with which God regards the unlawful destruction of human life. Under Moses, Israel later received detailed commandments governing criminal judgments and punishments, but the sanctity of human life was already established. The principle is not that every angry citizen may appoint himself executioner whenever he becomes offended. The principle is that deliberate bloodshed demands accountability because man bears the image of his Creator. Murder is not merely an unfortunate violation of community preferences. It is a terrible crime against human life. A government that refuses to restrain violent wickedness neglects one of its most serious responsibilities.

Romans 12:19 provides an important connection: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Immediately afterward, Romans 13 identifies civil authority as “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The Christian is forbidden to indulge private vengeance, while government receives authority to administer lawful punishment. There is a tremendous difference between justice and personal retaliation. An offended man does not become a judge simply because his anger is understandable, and a bereaved family does not acquire unlimited authority to punish whoever they suspect. Civil justice exists partly to prevent the strong, the wealthy, and the violent from settling every disagreement through intimidation. Remove lawful punishment, and wicked men will not suddenly develop a tender conscience. They will discover that the consequences of wrongdoing have become considerably less expensive. God gave government a sword because evil must be restrained, not because evil can be corrected by pretending it does not exist.

2. Justice Must Distinguish the Innocent From the Guilty

Proverbs 17:15 delivers a judgment that ought to be displayed wherever criminal cases are investigated or decided: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” Notice the two offenses. God condemns the official who excuses genuine wickedness, and He also condemns the official who punishes an innocent person. Some people recognize only the first danger. They want criminals punished, and rightly so, but they become careless when the evidence is questionable or the accused person is unpopular. Others recognize only the second danger. They are deeply concerned about wrongful convictions but treat the punishment of proven criminals

as though accountability itself were immoral. Scripture condemns both failures. Justice must neither acquit the guilty through corruption nor condemn the innocent through prejudice. A government that cannot distinguish those outcomes is not administering righteousness. It is conducting a lottery with prison sentences.

The Old Testament law required careful treatment of evidence and testimony. Deuteronomy 19:15 established that a matter was to be confirmed through sufficient witnesses, while the following verses dealt with false testimony and the danger of malicious accusations. That legislation belonged to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and Christians must not pretend that the modern courtroom is simply an extension of Israel's national theocracy. Nevertheless, the moral principles concerning truthful evidence, impartial judgment, and the seriousness of accusing another person remain unmistakable. Exodus 23:7 commands, “Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.” God did not instruct judges to decide cases by popularity, political pressure, personal dislike, or the emotional excitement of a crowd. A truthful accusation must be established, not merely repeated loudly enough to become fashionable. An accusation is not a conviction, and suspicion is not proof.

Proverbs 21:15 declares, “It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.” Righteous judgment provides protection for innocent people and consequences for those who commit wickedness. It is not cruel to protect a family from a violent offender, nor is it righteous to punish an innocent person in the name of appearing tough on crime. Proper justice requires both courage and restraint. It takes courage to punish a dangerous criminal whose influence may intimidate witnesses, and it takes restraint to refuse punishment when the evidence does not establish guilt. The man who demands conviction before hearing the facts has already replaced the courtroom with his imagination. The man who refuses to recognize proven wickedness has abandoned the victims in the name of an imaginary compassion. Justice is not measured by the number of people imprisoned or released. It is measured by whether righteousness governs the decision.

3. The Badge Carries Authority, but It Does Not Erase Accountability

Luke 3:14 records a question that bears directly upon men entrusted with military or coercive authority: “And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” John the Baptist did not command these soldiers to abandon their profession. He addressed misconduct associated with the misuse of their position. They were not to intimidate people unlawfully, make false accusations, or exploit their

authority for financial gain. The immediate historical setting concerns soldiers questioning John during his ministry to Israel, not the organization of modern police departments. Nevertheless, the moral instruction is impossible to miss. A man entrusted with force must not use that force to commit wickedness. The uniform does not excuse violence against the innocent, and a government commission does not give a man permission to become an officially sponsored bully.

This distinction is essential when considering the proper use of force. A lawful officer may face circumstances in which protecting innocent lives requires decisive physical intervention, including force against someone presenting an immediate serious threat. Romans 13 does not describe the sword as an empty ornament. Nevertheless, the authority to use force is not permission to indulge anger, cruelty, vengeance, or unnecessary violence. The moral question concerns what is lawful, necessary, proportionate, and directed toward a legitimate protective purpose. A restrained person does not become a target for punishment merely because he spoke disrespectfully. A prisoner does not lose his humanity because he was convicted of a crime. A suspect does not become guilty simply because an officer dislikes his attitude. The Christian serving in law enforcement must remember that the responsibility to protect the public includes protecting people from unlawful abuse by those wearing the same uniform. Authority is entrusted for service, not supplied as a license for personal temper.

There are honourable men and women who carry out difficult law-enforcement responsibilities with courage, restraint, and integrity. Some encounter dangerous circumstances, protect vulnerable people, investigate serious crimes, and perform work that others would rather criticize from a comfortable distance. Their legitimate service deserves respect. But that respect must never become unconditional approval of wrongdoing. A Christian police officer should be the kind of person who refuses a bribe, reports honestly, treats citizens fairly, and will not manufacture evidence to protect a colleague. Proverbs 10:9 declares, “He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.” A dishonest officer can damage public confidence far beyond the immediate victim of his misconduct. The man who falsifies evidence while wearing a badge has committed more than an ordinary lie; he has used entrusted authority to give his lie the appearance of official truth. The greater the authority, the greater the obligation to exercise it faithfully.

4. The Judicial Bench Is Not a Throne Above God's Law

Judges possess tremendous responsibility because their decisions can affect a person's liberty, reputation, property, family, and future. A judicial sentence may remove a dangerous offender from society, but an unjust judgment may destroy the life of someone

who committed no crime. Scripture therefore treats dishonest judgment with unmistakable seriousness. Deuteronomy 16:19 instructed Israel's judges, “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift.” The verse continues by warning that a gift blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Although that command belonged to Israel's national judicial system, its condemnation of bribery and partiality reveals God's moral judgment concerning corrupted decisions. Justice is not merchandise to be sold to the highest bidder. A judge who accepts favors in exchange for favorable treatment has turned the bench into a business counter and the administration of justice into an auction.

Consider what happened to Naboth in 1 Kings 21. Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth refused to surrender the inheritance of his fathers. Jezebel then arranged false accusations, producing witnesses who claimed Naboth had blasphemed God and the king. The innocent man was condemned and killed, and the king obtained the property he desired. There was an official process, there were witnesses, and there was a public accusation, but the entire proceeding was a wicked conspiracy. That account should frighten anyone who imagines that a formal judgment automatically proves righteousness. Governmental procedure can be manipulated, witnesses can lie, and powerful people can weaponize legal institutions for personal advantage. The false witnesses against Naboth were not righteous because they spoke in a public setting. The officials who cooperated were not innocent because they followed instructions. A legal proceeding may carry the appearance of authority while concealing an abomination before God.

The Christian judge, prosecutor, or magistrate must remember that the judgment of men is subordinate to the judgment of Almighty God. Proverbs 18:5 declares, “It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.” The wealthy must not receive special treatment because they possess influence, nor should the poor be automatically declared innocent simply because their circumstances arouse sympathy. Impartiality means that facts and applicable law govern decisions rather than favoritism, hostility, or political advantage. A judge should not confuse mercy with an unwillingness to administer deserved punishment, nor should he confuse severity with righteousness. Every case demands careful attention to evidence, the relevant law, and the rights of those involved. The judicial robe may command respect in an earthly courtroom, but it provides no disguise before heaven. A dishonest judge can silence a lawyer with a gavel; he cannot silence the Judge of all the earth.

5. False Witnesses, Crooked Prosecutors, and Prison Walls

One of the ugliest abuses of governmental power occurs when officials manufacture or conceal evidence to produce the outcome they desire. Exodus 20:16 declares, “Thou shalt

not bear false witness against thy neighbour." That command was given to Israel at Sinai, but the moral evil of lying against another person is plainly reaffirmed throughout Scripture. Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth with their neighbours. A fabricated statement can become especially destructive when entered into an official investigation, supported by dishonest testimony, or presented before a judge as reliable evidence. An ordinary liar can damage someone's reputation; a liar operating through the machinery of criminal justice can help place an innocent person behind bars. That is not a small professional mistake when done deliberately. It is wickedness armed with governmental credibility. A false accusation does not become truthful merely because it has been printed on official letterhead.

Prosecutors and investigators have responsibilities beyond obtaining convictions or producing impressive statistics. The purpose of criminal prosecution is the lawful administration of justice, not the collection of professional trophies. Evidence that establishes innocence must not be concealed merely because it complicates a case, and witnesses must not be pressured to manufacture the testimony someone wants to hear. The account of the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates how judicial authority can become corrupted when the desired verdict matters more than truth. Matthew 26:59 records that the chief priests, elders, and council sought false witness against Jesus to put Him to death. The case against the sinless Christ exposed the wickedness of men who had already determined the outcome. They were not examining evidence to discover righteousness; they were searching for accusations to accomplish their purpose. A man who decides upon guilt before honestly examining the facts is not pursuing justice. He is searching for paperwork to decorate a prejudice.

Correctional officers and prison administrators also carry serious responsibilities. A lawful sentence may require confinement, restrictions, and necessary security measures, but imprisonment does not authorize cruelty, exploitation, or punishment beyond lawful authority. Hebrews 13:3 instructs believers, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." The Christian should recognize the humanity of prisoners without pretending that their crimes are insignificant or that every prisoner has been unjustly convicted. Some are guilty of terrible wrongdoing and must be restrained to protect society. Others may be awaiting trial, appealing convictions, or suffering under conditions that demand lawful correction. The Christian working inside a correctional institution should exercise firmness without sadism and authority without personal revenge. A prison is not supposed to become a private kingdom where officers administer whatever punishment their temper suggests. When a man is lawfully confined, the government's responsibility to act justly does not disappear at the prison gate.

6. Defending Every Badge and Condemning Every Badge Are Both Foolish

There is a peculiar form of political loyalty that assumes an officer must be right because he wears a uniform. Present evidence of wrongdoing, and somebody immediately declares that supporting law enforcement requires defending whatever happened. Apparently, an official commission has become a substitute for the new birth, sanctification, and the fear of God. Scripture offers no such doctrine. Romans 13 identifies the legitimate purpose of civil authority, but it does not pronounce every officer incapable of corruption. When a public servant lies, steals, assaults an innocent person, or deliberately abuses authority, the Christian should call the conduct what Scripture calls it. Defending proven wickedness does not strengthen respect for legitimate law enforcement. It undermines the very justice that law enforcement exists to uphold. The man who insists upon excusing every official wrong has not established that he respects authority. He has demonstrated that he struggles to distinguish authority from the person temporarily exercising it.

The opposite extreme is equally unscriptural. Some people assume that every police officer is corrupt, every arrest is oppression, and every exercise of force is proof that government has declared war upon the public. Such conclusions disregard evidence and violate the same principles of justice they claim to defend. Proverbs 18:13 declares, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” That warning applies whether someone is rushing to defend an officer or rushing to condemn one. Facts must be established before conclusions are announced. A person resisting lawful arrest is not automatically innocent, and an officer accused of misconduct is not automatically guilty. The Christian must reject the temptation to decide everything according to political allegiance, personal resentment, or an incomplete account circulating through public discussion. A loud opinion is not evidence, and a crowd does not become an honest witness merely by repeating itself.

The proper biblical position requires both respect for legitimate authority and accountability for its misuse. Christians should support honest officers who protect the innocent, expose serious abuses when supported by evidence, and insist that investigations be conducted fairly. They should also refuse to turn isolated wrongdoing into an accusation against every person serving in the same profession. First Timothy 5:21 commands that matters be handled “without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” Although that instruction concerns church administration, the moral danger of favoritism is evident wherever decisions affecting others are made. A Christian should not demand a fair investigation only when the accused belongs to his preferred group. He should desire truth whether the truth vindicates an officer, exposes corruption, establishes a suspect's guilt, or proves an accused person's innocence. Justice does not change its

definition according to the uniform, the political label, or the popularity of the individual standing before judgment.

7. When the Sword Is Turned Against the Innocent

Isaiah 10:1–2 delivers a terrible warning: “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people.” The immediate prophetic setting concerns injustice among God's covenant people, Israel, and it must not be confused with a declaration that every modern nation possesses Israel's covenant standing. Nevertheless, the passage unmistakably reveals God's hatred of officials who use law and governmental influence to oppress the vulnerable. A ruler can possess legal authority and employ it for an unjust purpose. A legislature can enact a grievous decree, a judge can pervert a sentence, and an official can conceal cruelty beneath elaborate procedures. The fact that something has passed through the proper governmental machinery does not automatically establish its righteousness before God. A wicked command does not become holy after receiving a government seal.

When government punishes the innocent while protecting the guilty, it reverses the purpose established in Romans 13. The sword intended to restrain wrongdoing becomes an instrument for committing it. That reversal deserves serious condemnation, but the Christian's response must remain governed by Scripture. Believers may pursue lawful appeals, demand truthful investigations, expose documented wrongdoing, seek the correction of unjust policies, and advocate for the protection of innocent people. Paul himself appealed to legal protections when unlawfully treated, demonstrating that submission to civil authority does not require surrendering every available remedy. Acts 25:11 records his declaration, “I appeal unto Caesar.” Yet the Christian must not answer governmental dishonesty with fabricated accusations or respond to official brutality with personal vengeance. Romans 12:21 commands, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” The wickedness of another person never grants permission to abandon righteousness. A crooked official cannot make a Christian's dishonesty holy merely by committing the first offense.

Every Christian serving in government must also remember that his professional responsibilities are conducted before Almighty God. The police officer, prosecutor, judge, investigator, and correctional officer may operate under earthly supervision, but their ultimate moral accountability reaches beyond their department or courtroom. Colossians 3:25 declares, “But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.” The Lord does not accept a badge as an excuse for cruelty or a judicial title as justification for dishonest judgment. The Christian public

servant should therefore be known for integrity, courage, restraint, fairness, and an unwillingness to participate in corruption. The Christian citizen should pray for those entrusted with authority, respect lawful institutions, and refuse to excuse proven wickedness. Public office is a stewardship, not an exemption from judgment. A man may hold the sword for a season, but the One who permitted him to hold it will eventually examine how it was used.

Conclusion

Romans 13 establishes that civil government possesses legitimate authority to restrain evil and punish wrongdoing. That authority is neither imaginary nor optional, and Christians who despise every form of law enforcement have disregarded a plain biblical institution. A nation that refuses to distinguish criminal conduct from lawful behavior will eventually discover that disorder brings suffering upon innocent people. Yet the existence of rightful governmental power does not guarantee its rightful exercise. Proverbs 17:15 condemns both the justification of the wicked and the condemnation of the just. Isaiah warns against unrighteous decrees, and the commandments of God expose bribery, false testimony, oppression, and dishonest judgment. These truths must remain together. The Christian should neither join the crowd demanding that criminals escape accountability nor march behind the official who insists that everything done under governmental authority must be defended. God ordained justice, not corruption. He authorized lawful punishment, not cruelty. He established civil authority, not an earthly priesthood of untouchable officials.

Those who carry badges, administer courts, prosecute crimes, investigate wrongdoing, and supervise prisoners shoulder responsibilities that can affect lives for generations. An honest officer may save a family from violence, while a dishonest officer may destroy an innocent person's future. A righteous judge may protect society from a dangerous offender, while a corrupt judge may turn the courtroom into an instrument of oppression. A truthful witness may help establish justice, while a false witness may send an innocent person to prison. These are not insignificant matters to be settled through slogans, political loyalties, or personal feelings. Scripture demands truth, impartiality, restraint, and proper judgment. Christians must therefore oppose proven corruption without despising legitimate authority, and honour faithful public servants without excusing the wickedness of others. The badge deserves respect for the lawful responsibility it represents, but the man wearing it must still answer for his conduct. The bench deserves respect as an instrument of justice, but the judge occupying it is not above the judgment of God.

One day the policeman will lay aside his badge, the judge will step down from his bench, the prosecutor will close his files, and the prisoner will leave every earthly courtroom behind. Some will depart through ordinary circumstances, others through death, but none

will escape the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastes 12:14 declares, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” The believer's salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, not upon his professional record or public accomplishments, but every Christian remains responsible for his conduct before the Lord. Let the officer exercise lawful authority without cruelty. Let the judge administer justice without favoritism. Let the prosecutor seek truth rather than personal triumph. Let the Christian citizen respect righteous law enforcement without making an idol of government. And let every corrupt official understand that earthly authority provides no escape from heavenly accountability. **God gave government a sword to restrain the wicked, not to manufacture victims. A badge cannot sanctify brutality, a robe cannot disguise corruption, and a courtroom verdict cannot turn a lie into truth. The sword may belong to Caesar for a season, but the final judgment belongs to Almighty God.**

4 of 10 — The Christian and Government — The Soldier, the Sword, and the Saviour: Can a Christian Serve in the Military?

Primary Scriptures: Luke 3:14; Matthew 8:5–13; Acts 10:1–4; Romans 13:4; Ecclesiastes 3:8; Acts 5:29.

Introduction

“And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). There is a verse that ought to cause considerable difficulty for the religious crowd that insists a man cannot serve in the military and remain faithful to Almighty God. John the Baptist had soldiers standing before him, asking what their conduct ought to be, and he did not tell them to throw away their weapons, desert their posts, or resign their commissions. He told them to stop abusing people, stop making false accusations, and stop using their positions for dishonest gain. Evidently, John understood a distinction that some modern religious teachers have managed to overlook: possessing lawful military authority is one matter, and abusing that authority is another. A uniform does not automatically make a man wicked, but neither does it automatically make him righteous. The Bible judges the man wearing the uniform, not merely the cloth covering his back.

On the opposite side stands another crowd that has practically turned the national flag into an additional article of faith. According to their peculiar reasoning, every military campaign

must be righteous because their country ordered it, every commanding officer must be obeyed because he wears rank, and every criticism of governmental warfare amounts to disrespecting those who serve. That position is no more biblical than the first. A country does not become incapable of wrongdoing because its soldiers are courageous, and a war does not become holy because somebody opens a ceremony with prayer. The Scriptures recognize legitimate governmental authority, but they also condemn murder, cruelty, oppression, falsehood, and the shedding of innocent blood. A soldier may be required to defend his nation, protect innocent people, and obey lawful orders. He may never surrender his conscience to a government that demands wickedness. Patriotism has its proper place, but when patriotism begins overruling the Bible, somebody has promoted the flag above the throne of God.

The question must therefore be answered from Scripture rather than emotion, political slogans, or the competing opinions of religious organizations. Can a born-again Christian serve in the military, carry a weapon, obey lawful commanding officers, and remain faithful to Jesus Christ? Yes, military service is not inherently sinful. But that answer must be properly explained, because the Bible does not grant every government a divine commission to invade its neighbors, conquer territory, or commit atrocities under the convenient banner of national security. We must distinguish Israel's divinely directed wars under the Old Testament from military actions undertaken by present-day Gentile nations. We must distinguish legitimate defense from unlawful aggression, necessary force from cruelty, obedience from blind submission, and honouring veterans from worshipping military power. Above everything else, we must remember that a Christian soldier belongs first to the Lord Jesus Christ. An earthly government may command his military service within lawful limits, but no president, general, admiral, or commanding officer has authority to command him to sin.

1. John the Baptist Did Not Tell the Soldiers to Resign

Luke 3 places John the Baptist in the wilderness, preaching repentance and preparing Israel for the public manifestation of the Messiah. The chapter must be understood in its proper historical setting. John was ministering to Israel before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not delivering a Church Age military recruitment manual. Nevertheless, his instructions reveal an important biblical distinction concerning military conduct. When the people asked what they should do, John instructed those with sufficient clothing and food to share with those in need. When publicans asked the same question, he commanded them to exact no more than was appointed. Then the soldiers came, and John addressed the particular temptations associated with their profession. He did not issue a general condemnation of military service. He condemned specific forms of

wickedness that soldiers might commit while exercising authority. If John believed carrying a weapon in government service was inherently sinful, he had an excellent opportunity to say so. Instead, he dealt with the corruption of the man carrying it.

The first command was, “Do violence to no man.” That statement must be read alongside the military occupation of the men receiving it. John was not declaring that soldiers could never employ lawful force under any circumstances, for the passage gives no such explanation. He was confronting wrongful violence, the kind of intimidation and abuse associated with soldiers who use their authority against those unable to defend themselves. A man who carries a weapon for public service must not turn it into an instrument of personal cruelty. John continued, “neither accuse any falsely,” condemning the practice of using false charges to exploit or injure others. A military officer who manufactures accusations against an innocent person is not defending justice. He is committing wickedness while wearing the uniform of authority. The final command, “and be content with your wages,” addresses the greed that can encourage extortion and dishonest gain. John was not impressed by the uniform. He went straight after the sins that could be committed inside it.

This passage establishes a principle that cuts in both directions. Those who condemn every soldier merely for being a soldier must explain why John corrected military misconduct without condemning the occupation itself. Those who excuse every soldier because he serves his country must explain why John specifically warned soldiers against wrongdoing. Neither side can honestly claim the entire passage while ignoring half its meaning. A Christian serving in the military should be known for truthful reports, lawful conduct, disciplined restraint, and an unwillingness to exploit those beneath his authority. He should not intimidate civilians, invent charges against fellow servicemembers, abuse prisoners, or use his position to obtain dishonest advantage. The sword does not sanctify the hand that holds it. God is concerned with what that hand does. A soldier who fears God should be more trustworthy with authority, not less accountable because somebody issued him a rifle and a uniform.

2. The Roman Centurion Had More Faith Than the Religious Crowd

Matthew 8:5–13 introduces a Roman centurion who approached the Lord Jesus Christ concerning his servant, who was grievously tormented with palsy. A centurion was an officer serving within Rome's military structure, possessing authority over soldiers under his command. He was not an independent religious teacher wandering through Galilee looking for an opportunity to discuss military ethics. He was a professional soldier exercising authority within the Roman system. Yet when he came to Christ, he demonstrated remarkable humility and confidence in the Lord's power. He declared, “Lord,

I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (Matthew 8:8). Here was a Gentile military officer who understood something that many religious people standing much closer to the Scriptures had failed to grasp. He recognized authority, submitted himself to Christ, and believed the Lord could accomplish His will without physically entering the house.

The centurion explained, "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh" (Matthew 8:9). Notice that the man understood authority from both directions. He commanded others, but he also recognized that he himself stood beneath higher authority. That is the essential foundation of honorable military service. Rank gives responsibility, not independence from accountability. The centurion recognized that Christ possessed an authority greater than his own, and he trusted the Lord's word. Matthew 8:10 records Christ's astonishing response: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Imagine that! A Roman military officer displayed faith that exposed the unbelief of people who possessed the Scriptures and boasted in their religious privileges. The Lord commended the man's faith rather than delivering a speech condemning his occupation.

The historical setting must remain clear. This encounter occurred during Christ's earthly ministry to Israel, before the cross, and it is not a complete doctrinal discussion of Christian military service after Pentecost. Nor does Christ's commendation mean that every Roman campaign was righteous or every centurion behaved honorably. The Lord praised this man's faith, not the entire Roman military establishment. That distinction is essential. Nevertheless, the account gives no support to the claim that military service automatically places a man beyond God's approval. Here stood a soldier who exercised real governmental authority while acknowledging the infinitely greater authority of Jesus Christ. The military man was not required to abandon his understanding of order and discipline; he used that understanding to recognize the Lord's power. **The finest thing about the centurion was not that men obeyed his commands, but that he recognized the One whose word commands creation itself.** A soldier may understand military authority perfectly and still need to learn that Christ outranks every officer on earth.

3. Cornelius Wore a Roman Uniform, but He Still Needed the Gospel

Acts 10 introduces another Roman centurion, this time in the period following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. The passage begins, "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band" (Acts 10:1). The following verse describes him as "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." Here was a man employed in military service who feared

God, prayed, demonstrated generosity, and exercised influence within his household. The Scriptures do not present him as an unbelieving brute merely because he served Rome. His profession did not prevent him from fearing God or seeking divine truth. Yet the passage does not stop with admiration for his conduct. Cornelius still needed to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Religious devotion, sincere prayer, respectable conduct, and military service cannot provide the salvation purchased at Calvary.

Acts 10:4 records the angel's statement that Cornelius's prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God. But the angel directed him to send for Peter, who would deliver the message Cornelius needed. Acts 11:14 later explains that Peter would tell him words "whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." This is where careless Bible teaching often takes a wrong turn. Some people read the description of Cornelius's devotion and treat him as though his good works had already settled the question of salvation. They had not. The account demonstrates the movement of the gospel to Gentiles, the reception of the Holy Ghost, and God's acceptance of those who believe upon Jesus Christ. Cornelius was not saved by wearing a uniform, giving alms, praying regularly, or belonging to a respectable household. The gospel concerned the crucified and risen Saviour. A soldier may possess courage, discipline, generosity, and religious sincerity while still needing to be born again.

Peter preached that "through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). That is the message the military officer needed, and it remains the message every soldier needs today. Neither bravery in combat nor a distinguished service record can substitute for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." A decorated veteran cannot purchase heaven with medals, any more than a preacher can purchase it with sermons. Salvation rests upon Christ's finished work, not military achievement. Cornelius demonstrates that military service does not automatically exclude a man from responding to God, while his conversion demonstrates that respectable service does not make the gospel unnecessary. The centurion's most important encounter was not with a superior officer in the Roman military. It was with the message of the risen Saviour.

4. God Authorized Israel's Wars, but That Does Not Sanctify Every Modern War

The Old Testament contains unmistakable accounts of warfare conducted under God's specific instructions to Israel. The LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, established His covenant with that nation, and gave them an earthly inheritance. Under Moses and Joshua, particular military campaigns were connected with God's judgments, Israel's possession of the promised land, and the historical fulfillment of divine promises. Deuteronomy 7 and

Joshua 6 cannot honestly be separated from that covenant setting. Israel's national government was not a modern Gentile republic, and the Church is not Israel wearing a different uniform. Those distinctions matter tremendously when discussing warfare. A soldier in ancient Israel acting under an explicit divine command occupied a historical and doctrinal position that no modern president or military commander may simply claim for himself. God gave Israel specific instructions in specific circumstances. That does not authorize every nation to declare its next invasion a continuation of Joshua's campaigns.

Some religious nationalists have developed a remarkable talent for borrowing Old Testament battles whenever their political ambitions require a little divine decoration. They can turn a modern conflict into the conquest of Canaan faster than they can explain the difference between Israel and the Church. But a nation's military strength does not establish that God has commissioned its leaders to conquer foreign territory in His name. No present-day Gentile government possesses Israel's original covenant title to the promised land, and no national army has been appointed to establish the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. John 18:36 records the Lord's declaration, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.” The Lord's future earthly reign remains certain, but the Church has not been commissioned to bring it about through military conquest. The gospel is proclaimed through preaching, not imposed through artillery.

Ecclesiastes 3:8 declares that there is “a time of war, and a time of peace.” The passage recognizes warfare as a reality within human history, but it does not announce that every war is righteous merely because somebody has chosen the time to begin one. Romans 13:4 also establishes the legitimate coercive authority of civil government, though the immediate context concerns the punishment of evildoers rather than a detailed justification of international warfare. Taken together with the rest of Scripture, these passages permit recognition of legitimate military defense without removing the necessity of moral judgment. Defending a nation against violent aggression is not morally identical to invading another nation for greed, conquest, or political ambition. Protecting innocent lives is not the same thing as deliberately destroying them. **The Bible recognizes the sword of government, but it never teaches that every hand reaching for that sword has a righteous reason for drawing it.** The existence of warfare does not relieve rulers of responsibility for why they enter it.

5. Military Orders Are Real, but They Are Not Higher Than God's Commandments

Military service requires discipline, organization, and obedience to lawful commands. An army in which every soldier simply follows his personal preferences would cease to function as an organized military force. The centurion in Matthew 8 understood that

authority operates through an established chain of command. Scripture likewise recognizes that earthly authority is necessary for orderly government. Nevertheless, authority is always delegated, and delegated authority remains accountable to the One who permits it. A commanding officer may direct a servicemember to perform lawful military duties, follow regulations, maintain equipment, and carry out legitimate assignments. He cannot make sin righteous by placing it inside an official order. A man's rank may determine his position within the military hierarchy, but it does not determine his position above Almighty God. The stripes on a uniform do not outrank the commandments of Scripture.

Acts 5:29 establishes the decisive principle: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” The apostles spoke those words when earthly authorities commanded them to stop preaching Jesus Christ. The passage does not authorize soldiers to disregard every difficult assignment or inconvenient regulation. It establishes that human commands have limits when they directly contradict divine commands. A Christian soldier must therefore distinguish between lawful duties that involve hardship and unlawful orders requiring wickedness. He may be required to endure danger, separation, exhaustion, and conditions he would never voluntarily choose. None of those hardships automatically constitutes a biblical reason for disobedience. But if he is ordered to murder innocent civilians, torture prisoners, falsify evidence, commit atrocities, or deliberately participate in plainly sinful conduct, the conflict is different. Government has no authority to command wickedness merely because the command travels through a military chain of command.

Consider the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1. Pharaoh commanded the destruction of Hebrew male children, but the midwives feared God and refused the murderous order. Their situation concerned Egypt and Israel long before the establishment of the Church, yet the moral boundary is unmistakable. Obedience to an earthly superior cannot justify direct disobedience to God. The Christian servicemember who faces an unlawful order should use appropriate lawful procedures to refuse and report wrongdoing, understanding that such decisions may involve serious personal consequences. Faithfulness does not guarantee that earthly institutions will reward integrity. Daniel's obedience brought him into the lions' den, and the apostles' obedience brought persecution. But consequences cannot transform wickedness into righteousness. A soldier may have sworn to serve his country, yet no oath can authorize him to commit sin. **A command does not become moral because a general signs it, and a crime does not become righteous because an entire army participates in it.**

6. War Has Moral Boundaries, and Cruelty Is Not Courage

The legitimate use of military force must never be confused with unlimited permission to destroy human life. War places men in terrible circumstances where difficult decisions may carry grave consequences, but those circumstances do not erase the distinction between lawful military action and deliberate wickedness. Proverbs 6:16–17 declares that among the things the LORD hates are “hands that shed innocent blood.” The immediate passage is not a military handbook, but its moral condemnation of innocent bloodshed remains unmistakable. The Christian soldier must recognize the difference between engaging a legitimate military threat and intentionally attacking people who are not participating in hostilities. The innocent civilian does not become a lawful target simply because he lives inside an enemy nation. Children do not become guilty because their parents reside beneath a hostile flag. A prisoner's helplessness does not grant permission for cruelty. Warfare may be necessary in certain circumstances, but necessity is not a license for savagery.

Consider David's treatment of Uriah the Hittite in 2 Samuel 11. Uriah was a soldier displaying remarkable loyalty and discipline while David was attempting to conceal his own adultery. When David's schemes failed, he arranged for Uriah to be placed in a dangerous battle position and abandoned so that he would die. The king possessed real military authority, and the orders passed through the established command structure. Nevertheless, the arrangement was wicked. Second Samuel 11:27 declares, “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” There is an example that destroys the argument that military orders become righteous because the king issued them. David abused his authority to arrange an innocent man's death. Uriah's courage did not sanctify the king's conduct, and the machinery of military command did not conceal the murder from heaven. A ruler can use soldiers to accomplish wicked purposes, and the fact that an order is official does not settle its morality.

The same principle condemns deliberate brutality, false accusations, the abuse of captives, and acts of revenge committed against people who are no longer presenting a threat. Luke 3:14 warns soldiers against wrongful violence and false accusations, making clear that disciplined conduct matters even among those authorized to bear weapons. A Christian servicemember must not allow hatred, revenge, or group loyalty to become excuses for participating in atrocities. Nor should he automatically assume that every allegation of misconduct is true merely because someone makes it. Justice requires evidence, impartiality, and truthful investigation. Those responsible for military operations must consider their objectives, the legitimacy of force, and the protection owed to innocent people. War can produce circumstances that are morally complicated, but complexity does not abolish righteousness. A battlefield may make obedience more costly; it does not make the commandments of God disappear. **The courage to face an armed enemy is**

honorable, but the courage to refuse a wicked order may require a battle that nobody else can see.

7. Honour the Veteran Without Worshipping the Uniform

Scripture instructs believers to show proper honour where honour is due. Romans 13:7 commands, “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.” Christians should therefore recognize honorable military service without turning appreciation into political idolatry. Men and women have endured dangerous assignments, long separations, exhausting conditions, and tremendous personal sacrifice while serving their countries. Some have risked their lives to protect people they would never meet. Others have returned carrying permanent injuries or memories of death and suffering that remain with them long after the uniform is folded away. Their families have endured absences, uncertainty, interrupted childhoods, and the painful realities of military service. Those sacrifices should not be dismissed because someone holds a different political opinion about a particular war. A soldier's personal courage and a government's decision to enter a conflict are related subjects, but they are not identical moral questions.

At the same time, honouring veterans must never become worshipping military power. A national flag deserves appropriate respect as a symbol of one's country, but it is not the cross of Jesus Christ. A military cemetery may remind us of tremendous human sacrifice, but no battlefield death can accomplish what the blood of the sinless Saviour accomplished at Calvary. John 15:13 declares, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” That verse describes sacrificial love, but it must never be used to make military death equivalent to Christ's unique, substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, something no soldier could accomplish for another man's eternal salvation. We can honour the fallen without confusing patriotic remembrance with redemption. The soldier may give his life defending earthly freedom, but only Jesus Christ can give eternal life to the guilty sinner.

Christians must also remember veterans whose service has left burdens that are not immediately visible. Some return with physical injuries, disrupted families, financial difficulties, grief over fallen comrades, or deeply troubling memories of what they witnessed and endured. Others struggle with questions concerning decisions made under dangerous circumstances. These matters should not be dismissed with shallow religious slogans or the suggestion that genuine faith makes human suffering disappear. Galatians 6:2 commands, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Churches should be prepared to offer practical assistance, faithful friendship, prayer, careful biblical counsel, and appropriate help when medical or other specialized care is needed. Where

real sin has occurred, Scripture calls for repentance; where genuine suffering exists, Scripture commands compassion. The Christian veteran is not spiritually defective because he needs assistance, nor is he exempt from moral accountability because he served. The Church should neither idolize the veteran nor forget him when the parade has ended and the music has stopped.

Conclusion

The biblical evidence does not support the claim that military service is inherently sinful. John the Baptist instructed soldiers concerning righteous conduct without commanding them to abandon their profession. Jesus Christ commended the faith of a Roman centurion who understood authority. Cornelius, another centurion, feared God and received the message of salvation through the apostle Peter. Romans 13 recognizes the government's legitimate authority to bear the sword, while Ecclesiastes acknowledges that warfare belongs among the difficult realities of human history. Yet none of these passages authorizes every war, excuses every soldier's conduct, or transforms national policy into divine revelation. Scripture distinguishes Israel's specific military commissions under the Old Testament from the present calling of the Church. The Christian is not commissioned to establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ through earthly conquest. His primary spiritual warfare concerns the truth of God, the proclamation of the gospel, and faithfulness to the Captain of his salvation. A man may serve his country honorably, but he must never confuse earthly military service with the salvation of his soul.

The Christian soldier therefore occupies a position of serious responsibility. He must obey lawful commands, perform assigned duties faithfully, protect innocent lives, refuse dishonest conduct, and never participate willingly in atrocities or deliberate wickedness. He should respect his superiors without pretending that rank grants moral infallibility. He should honour his fellow servicemembers without excusing proven wrongdoing. He should love his country without assuming that every decision made by its government is righteous. The Christian civilian carries corresponding responsibilities: to pray for those serving, support lawful defense, care about the innocent affected by war, recognize genuine sacrifice, and refuse to make either hatred of soldiers or worship of military power a substitute for biblical judgment. No nation becomes God's chosen replacement for Israel merely because its citizens are patriotic. No political leader becomes another Joshua merely because he commands an army. And no soldier receives eternal salvation through courage, decorations, or a distinguished service record. Every man, whether dressed in military uniform or civilian clothing, must come to God through Jesus Christ.

One day every earthly military commander will surrender his authority, every national army will discover the limits of human power, and every earthly kingdom will stand beneath the

supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation 19:16 declares His title: “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” That is not an honorary rank presented by an earthly government. It is the rightful authority of the One who will return to reign. Until then, the Christian must live faithfully under the governments God has permitted, recognizing lawful military service without surrendering spiritual allegiance to any nation. Let the soldier serve with courage, integrity, restraint, and the fear of God. Let the officer remember that his authority is delegated and accountable. Let the veteran receive proper honour without being made an object of worship. Let the Church proclaim the gospel rather than pretending military conquest can establish Christ's kingdom. And let every believer remember that earthly patriotism must remain subordinate to heavenly citizenship. **A Christian may wear his country's uniform, carry its weapon, and defend its people, but he must never surrender his conscience to its commanders. The flag may identify the nation he serves, the uniform may identify the authority under which he operates, but the blood of Jesus Christ identifies the Saviour to whom he eternally belongs. Caesar may command the soldier's lawful service; only Christ deserves the soldier's soul.**

5 of 10 — The Christian and Government — The Ballot Box Is Not the Judgment Seat of Christ: Voting, Political Parties, and the Christian’s Witness

Primary Scriptures: Philippians 3:20; John 18:36; 2 Timothy 2:4; Proverbs 14:34; Daniel 2:21; 1 Timothy 2:1–4.

Introduction

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). There is a verse that ought to be nailed above the television of every Christian who has convinced himself that the next presidential election will determine whether Jesus Christ remains upon His throne. Paul did not say our conversation is in Washington, Jerusalem's present political institutions, the halls of Congress, or the headquarters of whichever political organization happens to be raising money this week. He said it is in heaven. Yet some professing believers have become so thoroughly entangled in earthly politics that they can recite a politician's latest speech but struggle to remember what the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians. They know every campaign controversy, every opinion poll, and every accusation being circulated against the opposition, but ask them to explain justification by faith and suddenly the conversation becomes terribly quiet. When a Christian knows more about his political enemies than his risen Saviour, something has gotten badly out of order.

There is another crowd that travels to the opposite ditch and declares that Christians should have absolutely nothing to do with government, voting, public service, or the moral condition of their country. Apparently, being a citizen of heaven means becoming useless as a citizen on earth. These folks can watch wickedness parade through public institutions, see injustice defended under the authority of law, and hear biblical righteousness mocked in public life, but they insist that Christians should never express a conviction concerning civil matters. That position is no more scriptural than turning the church into a political campaign headquarters. Daniel served faithfully under pagan rulers. Joseph exercised tremendous governmental responsibility in Egypt. Paul asserted his Roman citizenship when legitimate circumstances required it. The Bible does not command Christians to abandon earthly responsibility because their ultimate citizenship is heavenly. It commands them to keep their earthly responsibilities beneath the authority of Jesus Christ. There is a difference between refusing political idolatry and refusing to recognize the legitimate responsibilities of citizenship.

The real question is not whether Christians may vote, hold public office, advocate for righteous laws, or participate in legitimate governmental affairs. The question is whether they can do those things without surrendering their biblical identity to earthly political movements. The Church was commissioned to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to manufacture the Millennial Kingdom through legislative victories. Israel's national covenants were not transferred to the United States, and no political party has received divine authority to speak for the body of Christ. Nevertheless, righteousness remains righteousness, wickedness remains wickedness, and civil government remains an institution ordained by God. Christians must distinguish responsible participation from political obsession, patriotism from nationalism that usurps Christ's authority, and biblical conviction from blind partisan loyalty. They must also remember that an election can place a man in earthly office, but it cannot place a sinner in heaven. The ballot box determines certain civil outcomes. It is not the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1. Your Citizenship in Heaven Outranks Your Citizenship on Earth

Philippians 3:20 begins with a word that immediately draws attention to the Christian's heavenly position: “For our conversation is in heaven.” The surrounding passage establishes a deliberate contrast. Philippians 3:19 describes those “who mind earthly things,” while verse 20 directs the believer toward heaven and the expected return of the Saviour. Paul was not writing a political commentary about the proper selection of Roman officials. He was contrasting earthly-minded living with the believer's heavenly calling in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, that distinction has unmistakable consequences for political allegiance. The born-again Christian possesses a relationship to Christ that no earthly

government can bestow, revoke, or improve. Ephesians 2:6 declares that God “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” No political party can accomplish that. A candidate may promise opportunity, prosperity, security, and reform, but he cannot give a sinner an eternal position in the Son of God. That requires salvation by grace through faith.

The Christian's heavenly citizenship does not abolish his earthly responsibilities. Paul himself used his Roman citizenship when appropriate, and Acts 22:25 records his question concerning the legality of scourging a Roman citizen who had not been condemned. He did not renounce every earthly privilege simply because he belonged to Jesus Christ. Neither did he turn Roman citizenship into the foundation of his spiritual identity. The distinction is straightforward. Christians may exercise lawful rights, fulfill civic duties, and use legitimate political processes while remembering that their eternal standing rests elsewhere. A man may be grateful for the country in which he lives without pretending that citizenship in that country makes him acceptable before God. The thief on the cross did not need a voter registration card, a national anthem, or a political endorsement to receive the Lord's promise of paradise. He needed the Saviour. Earthly citizenship carries responsibilities and privileges; heavenly citizenship rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Daniel 2:21 declares that God “removeth kings, and setteth up kings.” There is a statement worth remembering whenever political commentators begin speaking as though the Almighty has misplaced control of human history. God governs the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms according to His providential purposes. That does not mean every elected official is righteous, every governmental decision enjoys divine approval, or every political outcome should be celebrated. It means history has never escaped the sovereignty of God. Nebuchadnezzar possessed an empire, yet God humbled him. Pharaoh commanded Egypt, yet God judged his wickedness. Earthly rulers possess real authority, but none possesses independent sovereignty. A Christian should therefore conduct himself responsibly without becoming spiritually unhinged whenever political power changes hands. The presidency is an important earthly office, but it is not the throne of heaven. **A Christian who believes God governs history should not act as though the Almighty needs permission from an election commission to remain in control.**

2. Christ's Kingdom Is Not Established Through a Campaign Committee

John 18:36 records the Lord Jesus Christ standing before Pilate and declaring, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” The setting matters. Christ was being examined by a representative of Roman governmental authority while facing the events that would culminate in His crucifixion. Pilate possessed earthly

power, but he stood before the rightful King. Christ did not deny His kingship. He explained that His kingdom did not derive its origin or authority from the present worldly order. His servants were not commissioned to establish His reign by armed resistance to prevent His arrest. The kingdom of God was not going to be secured through a political uprising against Rome. The Lord had come to accomplish redemption, not to organize an earthly campaign for political office. Men wanted a crown without a cross, but God's appointed work could not be replaced by their ambitions.

The dispensational distinction is essential. The fact that Christ declared His kingdom was not of this world does not cancel the Old Testament promises concerning His future literal earthly reign. Daniel 2:44 declares that the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. Revelation 11:15 announces, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 19 identifies the returning Christ as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” Those prophecies are not fulfilled by electing enough Christians to public office or passing enough legislation containing religious language. The promised kingdom belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ and will be established according to God's prophetic timetable. The Church is not authorized to seize Israel's earthly kingdom promises and then declare that political domination will bring in the Millennium. Christ will establish His kingdom. He does not need a campaign manager to make it happen.

This distinction exposes a fundamental error in certain forms of Christian nationalism. When believers begin treating political control as the means by which the Church must establish Christ's kingdom on earth, they have confused the commission of the Church with the future reign of the King. Matthew 28:19–20 commands the making of disciples through preaching and teaching, not the construction of an earthly theocracy through electoral machinery. The Church should proclaim truth concerning righteousness, sin, judgment, and salvation, and those truths may affect the convictions of citizens and officials alike. But legislation cannot regenerate the human heart. A government can prohibit certain wicked acts, yet it cannot produce the new birth. It can punish a thief, but it cannot justify the ungodly through faith. **You can pass a thousand laws against sin and still have a nation filled with sinners who have never been born again.** Civil law has its proper function; salvation belongs to Jesus Christ.

3. The Christian May Vote, but the Bible Must Govern His Conduct

Does the Bible command every Christian to vote in modern elections? No passage establishes such a universal command. Does the Bible prohibit a Christian from voting? No passage establishes that prohibition either. Modern representative elections are not the governmental system under which the apostles ministered, and the Church must not

manufacture commandments merely because a particular political practice has become important in contemporary society. Voting is a legitimate form of civil participation where the law provides it, and Christians may exercise that responsibility according to conscience informed by Scripture. Some believers consider participation an important opportunity to influence public policy, while others may conscientiously decline to participate in a particular election. Neither voting nor abstaining automatically establishes a person's spiritual maturity. The Christian who treats voting as a requirement for salvation has added something to the gospel, and the Christian who condemns every voter as worldly has added a prohibition the Bible never issued. Both errors place human rules where divine commandments ought to stand.

The absence of a universal biblical voting command does not mean Christians should abandon discernment when examining political questions. Proverbs 14:34 declares, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” That truth should influence how believers understand justice, honesty, corruption, public responsibility, and the treatment of innocent people. Scripture condemns bribery, false judgment, oppression, murder, dishonesty, and the abuse of authority regardless of which political organization promotes or excuses them. A believer evaluating public officials should distinguish documented conduct from political rumor and actual policy from campaign advertising. He should consider what responsibilities belong legitimately to civil government and avoid expecting politicians to perform the spiritual work committed to the Church. A candidate's use of religious vocabulary does not establish personal righteousness, and a campaign advertisement featuring a Bible does not prove that the Bible governs the candidate's conduct. Religious decoration is easy to purchase. Integrity is considerably harder to counterfeit before Almighty God.

The Christian must also remember that participation in an election does not require unquestioning personal loyalty to the candidate receiving his support. A voter may judge one proposal beneficial without approving everything advocated by the person presenting it. He may disagree with one policy without regarding everyone who supports it as an enemy of God. Public decisions involve real questions of law, authority, evidence, competing obligations, and practical consequences, and Scripture must not be used to pretend every governmental question comes with a directly corresponding verse. First Thessalonians 5:21 commands, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” That principle requires examination rather than blind enthusiasm. The Christian should refuse dishonest accusations, reject manipulation, and recognize that political participation does not relieve him of responsibility for his own conduct. **A vote is an earthly decision, not a sacrament, and the man who casts it does not thereby transfer his conscience into the keeping of a politician.**

4. A Political Party Is Not a Church, and Its Platform Is Not Scripture

One of the most dangerous developments in political religion occurs when believers begin treating party membership as though it were evidence of salvation. A man can profess the name of Jesus Christ, believe the gospel, and faithfully serve the Lord without joining a particular political organization. Conversely, a man can belong to a political party associated with religious causes and remain completely lost without Christ. Salvation is not administered through party registration. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." That excludes political affiliation as thoroughly as it excludes every other human achievement. Neither major American political party possesses a monopoly on righteousness, nor does either possess authority to revise the Scriptures. A party platform may contain positions a Christian considers just, positions he considers mistaken, and questions demanding careful examination. It is a political document, not another book of the Bible.

Political loyalty becomes particularly dangerous when it persuades Christians to excuse conduct they would condemn in anyone else. Proverbs 17:15 declares, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD." That judgment does not change when the person under examination belongs to a favored organization. Dishonesty remains dishonesty, bribery remains bribery, oppression remains oppression, and false accusations remain wicked regardless of political identity. The Christian should not become a professional excuse-maker for public officials. If a preacher were caught deliberately lying, many believers would demand accountability, yet some of those same people can spend an entire afternoon explaining why political deception should be overlooked when committed by someone they support. Apparently, the Ninth Commandment is supposed to take a vacation during campaign season. But the Almighty has not established one standard for church members and another for politicians whose policies happen to appeal to them.

Second Timothy 2:4 warns, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Paul was instructing Timothy concerning faithful service and endurance, not issuing a prohibition against every lawful civic activity. The warning nevertheless exposes a genuine spiritual danger. A believer can become so consumed with earthly controversies that his usefulness in the service of Christ is diminished. His conversation becomes dominated by partisan disputes, his friendships are measured by political agreement, and his attention to Scripture steadily gives way to arguments that accomplish little beyond producing more anger. The Christian soldier should not desert his spiritual responsibilities to become a permanent volunteer in

somebody else's political warfare. Earthly political organizations pursue earthly objectives. The servant of Christ has an eternal commission. **When a political platform becomes the standard by which Scripture is judged, the believer has not brought politics under the Bible; he has placed the Bible beneath politics.**

5. America Is Not Israel, and Patriotism Is Not a New Covenant

God made specific covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. He gave Israel a national identity, an earthly inheritance, and promises involving the land, kingdom, and future restoration. Under Moses, Israel received national laws regulating its civil, ceremonial, and religious responsibilities. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 even established instructions concerning the conduct of Israel's future kings. Those provisions belonged to God's dealings with Israel and cannot simply be transferred to whichever modern nation has the greatest number of professing Christians. The United States is not the replacement for Israel, its founding documents are not the Mosaic covenant, and its elected president does not inherit the throne promised to David. A nation may have a history influenced by biblical ideas without possessing Israel's covenant standing before God. Religious enthusiasm cannot alter the identity of the people to whom God made His promises. **You cannot turn America into Israel by placing a flag beside the pulpit and borrowing a few verses from Deuteronomy.**

Romans 11 makes clear that God's purposes concerning Israel have not been discarded. Paul declares in Romans 11:25 that blindness in part has happened to Israel “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” Verse 29 adds, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” The Church, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles united in Jesus Christ, must not be confused with Israel's national covenant position. Ephesians 3:6 identifies Gentile believers as fellowheirs and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, but this does not authorize the transfer of Israel's territorial promises to a modern Gentile government. The biblical doctrine of the Church and the prophetic future of Israel must remain distinct. National prosperity does not prove that a country has inherited Israel's covenant, and national suffering does not mean God has revoked the eternal security of born-again believers. Careless political theology creates confusion wherever it refuses to rightly divide the word of truth.

There is nothing inherently wrong with loving one's country, respecting its lawful institutions, remembering its sacrifices, or desiring that its people live in peace and righteousness. Jeremiah 29:7 instructed Jewish exiles to seek the peace of the city where God had caused them to be carried away captive, demonstrating that God's people could seek public welfare while living under a foreign government. That instruction had a particular historical setting, but its practical lesson is valuable. Love of country becomes

dangerous when it demands spiritual allegiance that belongs to Christ or declares national success to be the fulfillment of biblical kingdom prophecy. Patriotism recognizes legitimate earthly responsibilities; political idolatry turns the nation into an object of ultimate devotion. The Christian may honour the flag without making it an altar. He may respect national history without pretending every national decision was righteous. He may seek his country's welfare without forgetting that Jesus Christ died to save sinners from every nation, tongue, and people.

6. A Christian Can Serve in Government Without Selling His Testimony

Daniel provides a remarkable example of faithful service under governments that did not share his worship of the true God. He occupied positions of responsibility in Babylon and later under Medo-Persian authority, yet maintained his devotion to the LORD. Daniel 6:4 records that those seeking an occasion against him "could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." His enemies could not establish administrative corruption, dishonesty, or negligence, so they attempted to make his obedience to God the basis of an accusation. That ought to say something to Christians who believe public service necessarily requires spiritual compromise. Daniel's faithfulness did not prevent him from exercising governmental responsibility, and his governmental position did not excuse him from obeying God. He was reliable in public duty and steadfast in private worship. The same man who could be trusted with affairs of state could be found praying when prayer became dangerous.

Joseph also exercised substantial governmental responsibility in Egypt after Pharaoh entrusted him with administering preparations for the coming famine. Genesis 41 records his appointment and the practical measures undertaken to preserve food during years of plenty. Joseph's position belonged to God's providential dealings in a particular historical setting, and he was not a Church Age believer seeking election in a constitutional republic. Nevertheless, his conduct demonstrates that administrative ability, foresight, responsibility, and faithful service are not incompatible with devotion to God. A Christian serving in government today may have legitimate opportunities to administer public resources honestly, protect vulnerable citizens, oppose corruption, and fulfill lawful duties with integrity. Yet no government position grants a divine exemption from moral accountability. The believer must remain truthful even when dishonesty appears professionally advantageous, and he must refuse participation in wickedness even when resistance threatens his career. Public office can provide an opportunity for service, but it can also expose a man's character when power becomes more attractive than righteousness.

Christians must likewise distinguish the responsibility to speak biblical truth from the temptation to turn the pulpit into a campaign platform. John the Baptist publicly rebuked Herod's unlawful relationship, declaring in Mark 6:18, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.” He did not soften God's standard because the offender held political power. Yet the Church's commission remains the proclamation of the gospel, the teaching of sound doctrine, and the edification of believers. A preacher should not become a spokesman whose principal function is defending a political organization. He must be free to condemn sin regardless of who commits it and to proclaim salvation regardless of which party a sinner supports. A church may teach what Scripture says about righteousness, authority, marriage, honesty, and the protection of innocent life without requiring every member to surrender independent political judgment to a favored party. **The pulpit should be governed by the Bible, not by the latest campaign briefing delivered to the preacher's office.**

7. Pray for the Ruler, Preach the Gospel, and Keep the Main Thing Straight

First Timothy 2:1–2 declares, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” Notice that Paul commanded prayer for rulers without first requiring agreement with their political policies. The early Church was not operating beneath a government controlled by born-again Bible believers. Nevertheless, Christians were instructed to pray for those possessing authority. The purpose included the opportunity to live peaceably and faithfully, free to conduct themselves in godliness and honesty. That command deserves considerably more attention than it often receives. A believer who has spent the entire week mocking a political leader should examine whether he has spent any time praying for him. Opposing a public official's policies does not cancel the responsibility to pray for his salvation, wisdom, and just conduct.

Paul continues in 1 Timothy 2:3–4, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” There is the spiritual priority that political obsession repeatedly threatens to bury. God directs attention toward the salvation of sinners, not merely the management of earthly institutions. A person may support a policy a Christian considers mistaken and still be someone who needs to hear the gospel. He may occupy public office, lead a political organization, or hold convictions sharply opposed to Scripture, yet his greatest need remains reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 5:20 declares, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” An ambassador of Christ should not

become so consumed with political hostility that he loses the opportunity to proclaim the message entrusted to him. The gospel must never be reduced to another weapon in an earthly partisan struggle.

Titus 3:1–2 instructs believers “to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.” Those words do not prohibit legitimate criticism of public wrongdoing. They do prohibit the reckless conduct that some Christians mistakenly call boldness. A man can speak firmly about sin without inventing accusations, and he can disagree sharply about public policy without treating another person as worthless. Christian witness is not strengthened by malicious speech, dishonest exaggeration, or perpetual quarrelling. Believers should examine their words before repeating political claims, refuse slander, and recognize when arguments have become exercises in pride rather than opportunities to establish truth. The Christian has a responsibility to make righteousness visible through conduct as well as proclamation. **If political controversy has made a believer more eager to destroy an opponent's reputation than to see a sinner saved, his priorities deserve correction by the Word of God.**

Conclusion

The ballot box has a legitimate place in the civil life of nations that provide citizens with electoral participation, but it has no jurisdiction over the eternal destiny of the human soul. Christians may vote, serve in government, advocate for righteous policies, question public officials, and participate responsibly in civic affairs without abandoning their heavenly calling. They may also differ in their judgments concerning particular political questions without automatically becoming enemies of the faith. Scripture provides moral principles that must govern Christian conduct, but it does not transform the platform of any political party into divine revelation. Government is ordained to exercise legitimate civil authority, while the Church is commissioned to preach the gospel and teach the Word of God. The two institutions have different responsibilities, and confusion follows whenever those responsibilities are merged. The Christian should neither withdraw from all earthly duty nor surrender his spiritual identity to political ambition. His first loyalty belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose authority exceeds every earthly government and whose salvation cannot be administered through an election.

The dangers of political idolatry are real because the human heart has always been willing to exchange trust in the living God for confidence in visible power. Israel demanded a king in 1 Samuel 8, and the LORD told Samuel, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). That historical account

concerns Israel's request for a monarchy and must not be treated as a direct condemnation of modern representative government. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the danger of looking to earthly political arrangements as though they could replace faithful dependence upon God. Political institutions can perform legitimate responsibilities, but they cannot accomplish redemption. A nation may possess excellent laws and still be filled with lost sinners. It may enjoy prosperity and still be spiritually corrupt. It may elect officials who speak respectfully about religion while its churches neglect the Scriptures. No election result settles the question of whether an individual has believed the gospel. **The government can count votes, but it cannot count a man righteous before God. Only the Lord can justify the sinner who believes on Jesus Christ.**

Let the Christian exercise every legitimate civic responsibility with honesty, discernment, and a conscience governed by Scripture. Let him respect lawful authority without worshipping it, condemn wickedness without becoming dishonest, and seek justice without confusing political achievement with spiritual revival. Let him pray for rulers whether he supports their policies or opposes them. Let him remember that Israel's promised kingdom belongs to God's prophetic purposes, that the Church is not an earthly political organization, and that Jesus Christ will establish His own reign according to the Scriptures. Above all, let him keep the gospel of grace through faith at the center of his witness. No political party shed its blood for his sins. No president rose from the dead to secure his justification. No election commission can seal him unto the day of redemption. The Christian's salvation, standing, and eternal hope rest entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. **A ballot may help determine who occupies an earthly office, but it cannot determine who sits upon the throne of heaven. Political parties will change, administrations will pass away, and every campaign promise will eventually meet the judgment of history. But the Lord Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Cast your earthly vote with proper judgment if you choose to participate, but never cast away your heavenly testimony to defend a politician who cannot save your soul.**

6 of 10 — The Christian and Government — Pray for the King, Even When You Would Never Vote for Him

Primary Scriptures: 1 Timothy 2:1–4; Jeremiah 29:7; Proverbs 21:1; Romans 12:17–21; Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 2:17.

Introduction

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1–2). There is a commandment that ought to make a considerable number of politically excited Christians uncomfortable. Paul did not say to pray for the king when he lowers your taxes, protects your preferred policies, appoints agreeable officials, or happens to belong to the political movement you support. He said to pray for kings and all that are in authority. That includes the ruler whose policies you oppose, the governor whose decisions you challenge, and the public official whose conduct you believe deserves serious correction. Some believers can spend three hours arguing about a president and cannot find three minutes to pray for him. They have memorized every political insult circulating through public discussion, but apparently misplaced the verse commanding intercession. It is a strange Christianity that has enough breath to curse an administration but none left to petition Almighty God.

There is another error just as dangerous, and it usually arrives wearing a respectable religious expression. Some Christians believe praying for a ruler means approving his conduct, defending his policies, or pretending his wickedness is somehow excusable because he occupies an office ordained by God. That is not what Paul commanded. A man may pray for the salvation of a corrupt official while openly condemning the corruption. He may ask God to give wisdom to a ruler while firmly opposing that ruler's decisions. He may honour the office without flattering the occupant, and he may desire the peace of his country without endorsing every action taken in its name. Prayer does not turn injustice into righteousness. It brings the matter before the One who judges both the ruler and the citizen. The Christian who refuses to pray because he disapproves of the politician has misunderstood prayer, and the Christian who refuses to rebuke wrongdoing because he prayed has misunderstood righteousness.

The issue reaches deeper than political manners or the proper way to discuss public affairs. It concerns obedience to the Word of God, the Christian's testimony before a lost world, and the difference between confidence in divine authority and bondage to earthly political passions. First Timothy 2 places prayer for rulers within the responsibilities of believers living under civil government, not within a political campaign seeking control of the state. The apostle connects that prayer with peaceful living, godliness, honesty, and the salvation of sinners. Those priorities deserve careful examination because the modern Christian can become so consumed with who occupies an earthly office that he forgets who occupies the throne of heaven. This study will examine what Scripture commands believers to pray, why wicked rulers are not excluded, how Christians may oppose governmental wrongdoing without surrendering biblical conduct, and why the salvation of a president matters more eternally than the preservation of his political career.

1. First of All Means Prayer Comes Before Political Outrage

Paul begins with the words, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all.” That expression deserves attention before anybody rushes to the rest of the passage looking for an exception. The apostle was writing to Timothy concerning the proper conduct of believers and the ordering of God's work among His people. In the preceding chapter, he had warned about false doctrine, identified the importance of a good conscience, and charged Timothy to war a good warfare. Then, as he proceeded into instructions concerning the congregation, he placed prayer in the foreground. He did not begin by teaching Timothy how to capture Roman political institutions or establish a Christian government through public agitation. He began with supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving. That is not an insignificant arrangement. A church may have opinions about every political controversy imaginable, but if it has lost its dependence upon God, it has already surrendered something far more important than political influence. A prayerless church may be politically informed and spiritually impoverished.

Notice the four expressions Paul employs. Supplications involve earnest requests arising from genuine need. Prayers bring matters before God in recognition of His authority. Intercessions concern petitions made on behalf of others, including people who may never know that someone has prayed for them. Giving of thanks acknowledges God's goodness and providence rather than treating every earthly circumstance as though heaven had abandoned its responsibilities. These expressions should not be turned into an artificial formula requiring believers to repeat a particular sequence before God will listen. They reveal the breadth of the Christian's prayerful responsibility. A believer may ask God to restrain an official's wickedness, grant him wisdom, protect those affected by his decisions, and bring him to saving faith. He may also thank God for lawful order, the preservation of peace, and whatever genuine good has been accomplished. Thanksgiving does not require pretending that everything is good. It requires remembering that God remains good when government is not.

The words “first of all” also expose the disorder of a believer whose first response to every political development is anger. Before considering the facts, he has already chosen an accusation. Before determining whether a report is true, he has already repeated it. Before opening his Bible, he has opened another argument. Yet prayer remains neglected. This does not mean Christians should ignore public information or refuse legitimate civic participation. It means that political involvement must never replace dependence upon God. James 1:20 declares, “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” A furious Christian may imagine that his indignation is accomplishing something important, but volume is not a spiritual gift. A man can shake his fist at a government building until his

shoulder becomes sore without accomplishing what one sincere prayer may accomplish according to God's will. Political enthusiasm is not necessarily wrong, but it makes a miserable substitute for communion with the Almighty.

2. Paul Said Kings, Not Merely the Kings You Like

First Timothy 2:2 identifies the objects of this prayer: “For kings, and for all that are in authority.” The instruction is striking because the early Church did not enjoy the advantages of a government organized around New Testament Christianity. Roman political and religious life was fundamentally different from the convictions of the apostles, and believers faced opposition from authorities who did not recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. Nevertheless, Paul did not restrict prayer to rulers who demonstrated personal godliness. He did not require kings to sign a statement of faith before becoming eligible for Christian intercession. The command includes those exercising governmental authority because their decisions affect the lives of people under their jurisdiction. A ruler's unbelief makes his need for prayer greater, not smaller. If Christians prayed only for public officials who already agreed with them, they would reduce intercession to another expression of political favoritism. Paul refused to place that limitation upon the command.

Consider the difference between respecting an office and approving an officeholder's conduct. Romans 13 establishes the legitimacy of civil government, while Scripture repeatedly condemns rulers who practice injustice. Pharaoh possessed earthly authority, but God judged his oppression. Nebuchadnezzar occupied a powerful throne, but the Lord humbled his pride. Herod exercised governmental power, but his wickedness remained wickedness. The existence of authority never establishes the righteousness of everything performed beneath it. Nevertheless, those realities do not cancel the instruction to pray. A Christian can ask God to remove a ruler from office through lawful circumstances, restrain his harmful decisions, expose dishonesty, and bring him to repentance without contradicting the obligation to intercede. Prayer is not a declaration that the ruler deserves another term. It is an acknowledgment that the ruler stands beneath God's authority. The Christian may reject a politician's policies without rejecting God's command to pray for the politician.

This principle becomes especially important when political disagreement turns into personal hatred. A believer may become so accustomed to regarding public officials as enemies that he forgets they are human beings with eternal souls. He no longer desires correction, repentance, or salvation. He wants humiliation, destruction, and the satisfaction of seeing an opponent suffer. That spirit is not the fruit of sound biblical doctrine. Proverbs 24:17 warns, “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.” The verse does not forbid satisfaction when justice is

established or harmful conduct is stopped. It warns against malicious delight in another person's downfall. Some Christians apparently believe the command to love enemies contains an exception for election years. Unfortunately for that theory, the Bible contains no such amendment. A ruler may deserve public accountability, but the Christian must not allow righteous opposition to deteriorate into private revenge.

3. Pray for Peace, Justice, and the Freedom to Serve God

Paul explains an important purpose of praying for authorities: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:2). Notice the character of the desired result. The apostle does not ask believers to pray that Christians will control every government office, become the wealthiest class in society, or enjoy uninterrupted political victories. He directs them toward conditions in which believers may live peaceably while practicing godliness and honesty. Civil order matters because disorder exposes innocent people to violence, corruption, and oppression. Christians should therefore desire governmental decisions that restrain wickedness, protect human life, administer justice, and permit lawful religious activity. A nation does not need a Christian dictator to protect religious freedom. It needs civil authorities who recognize the limits of their responsibilities and refuse to punish peaceful citizens for obedience to God.

The words “godliness and honesty” must not be overlooked. Paul was not asking for quiet living so Christians could become comfortable, wealthy, and spiritually useless. He desired conditions favorable to faithful conduct before God and men. The Christian should pray that churches may preach the Scriptures, families may worship the Lord, believers may assemble peaceably, and the gospel may be proclaimed without unlawful interference. He should pray for judges who administer impartial justice, law-enforcement officers who restrain genuine criminals, and public officials who refuse bribery and oppression. These requests concern the legitimate purposes of government rather than its conversion into an earthly church. Civil government cannot produce the new birth, but it can protect or obstruct the ordinary freedoms through which believers conduct their lives. The Christian should be concerned about those conditions without imagining that governmental permission is the source of his spiritual authority.

Peace must never be confused with the absence of biblical conviction. A government might offer outward tranquility on the condition that preachers remain silent about sin, churches abandon unpopular doctrines, or believers surrender obedience to Scripture. Such an arrangement would not satisfy Paul's desire for life conducted “in all godliness and honesty.” Godliness cannot be purchased by denying God, and honesty cannot be maintained through cowardly falsehood. Acts 5:29 declares, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” That boundary remains, even while Christians sincerely pray for peaceful

relations with civil authorities. The believer should seek peace without compromising righteousness and oppose wickedness without manufacturing unnecessary conflict. Romans 12:18 provides the proper balance: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” The phrase recognizes that peace is not always within one person's control. The Christian's duty is to remain faithful, not to purchase tranquility by surrendering the truth.

4. The Most Powerful Politician Still Needs to Be Saved

First Timothy 2:3–4 continues, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” There is the spiritual purpose that political obsession so easily buries. The apostle connects prayer for rulers with God's concern for the salvation of men. The king may possess armies, wealth, influence, official residences, and the authority to issue commands affecting millions of people, but none of those things can remove his sins. A governor may sign legislation, a judge may pronounce sentences, and a president may grant earthly pardons, but not one of them can issue himself an eternal pardon before Almighty God. Romans 3:23 declares, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” That includes the poor man standing before a magistrate and the wealthy man occupying the highest office in the nation. Earthly rank does not impress the righteousness of God.

The gospel needed by rulers is the same gospel needed by everybody else. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not by human achievement. A politician cannot purchase salvation by supporting religious causes, quoting Scripture during public ceremonies, or appointing officials who happen to share Christian convictions. Neither does his record of wickedness place him beyond the saving power of Jesus Christ while he remains alive and able to believe. Paul himself had persecuted believers before the Lord saved him. First Timothy 1:15 declares, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” If the former persecutor could be saved by grace and appointed to preach the gospel, Christians have no biblical warrant for declaring an unsaved ruler beyond God's reach.

This raises an uncomfortable question: when was the last time you specifically prayed for the salvation of a political leader you strongly oppose? Not merely that he would lose an election, abandon a particular policy, or be replaced by someone more agreeable, but that he would recognize his guilt before God and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a prayer does not require approving his actions. Genuine conversion would demand the

abandonment of falsehood and wickedness, not their religious decoration. The Christian should desire repentance and salvation rather than the mere destruction of a political enemy. Heaven does not become more glorious because a politician loses office, but the salvation of a sinner is cause for rejoicing. Luke 15:10 declares that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. **A politician may lose every election and still gain eternal life through Christ, or win every election and lose his own soul. The ballot measures earthly support; the gospel addresses eternity.**

5. The King's Heart Is in God's Hand, Not His Own

Proverbs 21:1 declares, “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” That statement ought to correct the Christian who imagines earthly rulers operate beyond God's providential authority. The king may possess tremendous political power, yet his heart is not outside the government of Almighty God. Human rulers make real decisions and remain responsible for their conduct, but they do not possess sovereignty independent of their Creator. Daniel 2:21 likewise declares that God “removeth kings, and setteth up kings.” Scripture does not present the Almighty as a helpless spectator waiting for earthly politicians to decide whether His purposes may proceed. The ruler may surround himself with advisers, guards, officials, and elaborate institutions, but none of those arrangements places him beyond divine reach. A king may command a nation, but he cannot command the God who gave him breath.

Consider Cyrus, the Persian king, in the prophetic setting of Isaiah 44 and 45. God identified Cyrus in connection with His purposes concerning Jerusalem and the restoration of His people. Isaiah 45:4 contains the remarkable declaration, “I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.” The passage concerns God's specific dealings with Israel and must not be transformed into a promise that every modern political leader occupies an equivalent prophetic position. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that the Lord can accomplish His purposes through rulers who do not personally know Him. Ezra 1 records the decree associated with the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the house of the LORD. God was not dependent upon Cyrus first becoming a Jewish prophet before using his authority. Divine providence operates beyond human expectations. Sometimes God works through a ruler's favorable decision; sometimes He restrains a ruler's wicked intention; sometimes He permits consequences that reveal the folly of men.

This truth should strengthen prayer without encouraging careless speculation. Christians must not claim to know every hidden reason God allows a particular official to occupy power, nor should they pretend that every political development is a direct fulfillment of some prophecy concerning Israel. God's sovereignty is revealed; many details of His

providence remain hidden. Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us that “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God.” The believer's responsibility is to obey what God has revealed rather than manufacture certainty about what He has not explained. We may ask God to direct rulers toward just decisions, restrain harmful intentions, and open opportunities for righteousness without announcing that we possess private knowledge of heaven's political schedule. **The king may have a cabinet full of advisers, but the LORD does not need an appointment to reach his heart.** Pray with confidence in divine power, and leave the secret counsels of providence where Scripture places them.

6. Jeremiah Told Captives to Pray for the City That Conquered Them

Jeremiah 29:7 contains an extraordinary instruction: “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” The historical setting is essential. Jeremiah was addressing Jewish captives carried into Babylon during God's judgment upon Judah. They were not citizens enjoying the privileges of a nation they had freely chosen to inhabit. They were displaced people living under the authority of a foreign empire. Yet God instructed them to seek the peace of the place where they lived and pray for its welfare. The command did not mean Babylon's idolatry had become righteous or that God's covenant with Israel had been transferred to the Babylonian government. It meant the captives had responsibilities during their appointed period of exile. They were to live, build, plant, and conduct themselves faithfully while awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises.

The context becomes clearer when Jeremiah 29:10 is considered. God spoke of completing seventy years at Babylon and afterward visiting His people according to His promise. The famous language concerning God's thoughts toward Israel in verse 11 belongs to that historical and covenant setting. It should not be detached from the chapter and converted into a universal promise that every modern Christian will enjoy immediate earthly prosperity. Nor should the command to seek Babylon's peace be treated as though the Church were identical to the exiled nation of Judah. Rightly dividing the Word requires us to preserve the original audience and circumstances. Nevertheless, the practical lesson is powerful. God's people were instructed to conduct themselves responsibly even while living beneath a government that did not share their worship. They were not commanded to endorse Babylonian idolatry, but neither were they encouraged to spend their captivity manufacturing disorder.

There is a lesson here for Christians who believe political opposition eliminates every responsibility to seek public peace. A believer may live under an administration whose policies he strongly rejects, yet he should still desire protection for innocent people, honest judgment, lawful order, and conditions in which families can live safely. He should not

secretly rejoice when public disorder harms ordinary citizens merely because the government responsible for addressing it belongs to an opposing political movement. That is not biblical conviction; it is spite wearing religious clothing. The Christian's concern for his neighbors must not disappear whenever political circumstances become unfavorable. Galatians 6:10 commands believers to do good unto all men as opportunity permits, especially unto the household of faith. Praying for national peace is therefore consistent with loving one's neighbor, not an endorsement of every governmental decision. **The Christian who wishes calamity upon his country merely to embarrass its rulers has forgotten that ordinary families live beneath those rulers too.**

7. Rebuke Wickedness Without Becoming Wicked Yourself

Matthew 5:44 records the Lord's words, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” These words were spoken during Christ's earthly ministry to Israel, within the setting of the Sermon on the Mount, and they must not be confused with a complete exposition of the Church's heavenly position in Christ. Nevertheless, the moral command to reject hatred and pray for enemies is reinforced in the epistles. Romans 12:14 instructs believers, “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.” Verse 19 commands them not to avenge themselves. The New Testament provides no exemption for political opponents. Christians may firmly oppose policies, expose substantiated wrongdoing, and seek lawful accountability without indulging malicious hatred. Disagreement concerns conduct and convictions; vengeance concerns the desire to injure an enemy. Those are not the same thing.

Romans 12:20 continues, “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” Paul is not teaching believers to abandon discernment or cooperate with wickedness. He is forbidding personal revenge and commanding conduct that reflects righteousness rather than retaliation. The chapter concludes, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” A Christian who becomes dishonest while opposing dishonest politicians has been overcome by the very wickedness he condemns. The same applies to slander, cruelty, deliberate humiliation, and the spreading of accusations without evidence. Ephesians 4:29 commands that corrupt communication should not proceed out of the believer's mouth. That instruction remains in force even when a man is discussing public officials whose actions he considers disgraceful. A sharp biblical rebuke can expose sin without manufacturing facts. Elijah did not need to invent Ahab's wickedness, and John the Baptist did not need a political gossip campaign to declare Herod's adultery unlawful.

First Peter 2:17 commands, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” The distinction is plain. Honour the king, but fear God. Civil respect does not require

moral surrender, and reverence for God does not require contempt for legitimate governmental authority. The believer may oppose a ruler's policies, challenge his conduct through lawful means, or support his removal from office without treating him as an object of personal hatred. Titus 3:2 likewise commands Christians “to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.” That is not a command to remain silent about proven corruption. It is a command to maintain godly conduct while speaking the truth. The Christian should not become so eager to defeat wickedness that he begins borrowing wickedness as a weapon. **If your defense of righteousness requires lying about your enemy, you have already surrendered the righteousness you claim to defend.**

Conclusion

The apostle Paul did not command Christians to pray only for rulers whose policies pleased them. He instructed believers to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all men, specifically including kings and all who occupy governmental authority. That command was given to the Church under grace, not merely to Israel under the law, and it remains a serious responsibility for Christians living beneath civil governments today. The desired results include peaceful living, godliness, honesty, and conditions favorable to the proclamation of truth. The passage also directs attention toward God's desire that men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. A president's political authority cannot remove his guilt before God, and a governor's earthly influence cannot supply the righteousness required for eternal life. The most powerful ruler in the country remains a sinner who needs the gospel. Praying for such men is not political compromise. It is obedience to the God who has commanded His people to intercede.

The Christian must also recognize that prayer and righteous opposition are not enemies. He may pray for a public official while condemning documented wrongdoing, demanding justice, advocating lawful reforms, and disagreeing with governmental decisions. Scripture never requires believers to call evil good merely because an elected official commits it. Neither does it permit the believer to indulge hatred, false accusations, or personal revenge because an official deserves correction. Jeremiah's instruction to the captives in Babylon demonstrates the responsibility to seek peace without embracing idolatry. Proverbs reminds us that the king's heart remains beneath God's providential authority. Romans commands believers to overcome evil with good. Peter instructs them to honour the king while fearing God. These passages belong together, and none may be discarded merely because political anger makes obedience inconvenient. A Christian should be able to speak against wickedness with an open Bible and pray for the wrongdoer with a clear conscience.

Every earthly ruler will eventually leave office, surrender his authority, and stand before the Judge of all the earth. Some will be remembered for honorable service, others for corruption, and many for a mixture of decisions whose full consequences are known only to God. But none will take his title, influence, or political organization into eternity as a substitute for the blood of Jesus Christ. The believer therefore has a higher responsibility than winning political arguments. He must proclaim the gospel, honor legitimate authority, oppose genuine wickedness, maintain truthful conduct, and pray for those whose decisions affect the lives of others. Let him pray for righteous laws, honest judgment, protection of the innocent, and opportunities for the Word of God to go forth freely. Let him pray for the salvation of leaders he admires and leaders he opposes. **You do not have to vote for a man to pray for him, approve his conduct to desire his salvation, or defend his policies to ask God to restrain his wickedness. Caesar may occupy an earthly throne for a season, but the Christian has access to the throne of grace. It is a terrible waste to spend all day shouting at Caesar and never speak to the God who holds Caesar's heart in His hand.**

7 of 10 — The Christian and Government — Crooked Politicians, Corrupt Courts, and the Price of Telling the Truth

Primary Scriptures: Proverbs 29:2; Proverbs 17:23; Isaiah 1:23; Isaiah 10:1–2; Micah 6:8; Ephesians 5:11; Exodus 23:6–8.

Introduction

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Proverbs 29:2). There is a verse that ought to be engraved above every legislative chamber, judicial bench, and government office in the country. God did not say the people rejoice whenever a politician wins an election, a governor signs a bill, or a judge puts on a black robe. He said they rejoice when the righteous are in authority. And when wickedness occupies the throne, the people suffer. That is not complicated political philosophy. That is the Word of God. Yet some Christians have developed the remarkable ability to recognize corruption instantly when committed by their political opponents while becoming completely blind when the same conduct appears among their preferred officials. Evidently, political loyalty has become a substitute for eyesight. But Almighty God is not color-blind when it comes to political parties; He is impartial when it comes to sin. A bribe remains a bribe, a lie remains a lie, and a thief remains a thief even when his campaign literature contains a Bible verse.

The Scriptures contain no shortage of wicked rulers, corrupt judges, dishonest officials, and religious hypocrites who attempted to conceal their wrongdoing beneath the appearance of authority. Ahab stole Naboth's vineyard through a murderous conspiracy. Jezebel arranged false testimony and turned the machinery of government into an instrument of theft. Samuel's sons accepted bribes and perverted judgment. Felix hoped to receive money from the apostle Paul while holding him in custody. The prophets condemned rulers who oppressed the poor, neglected widows, accepted dishonest rewards, and wrote unjust decrees. None of those sins became acceptable because the perpetrators occupied recognized positions of authority. Romans 13 establishes the divine institution of civil government, but it does not establish the divine innocence of every man operating within it. God ordained government to restrain wickedness, not to provide wicked men with an official hiding place. A politician may possess a legitimate office while committing illegitimate acts through its authority.

The Christian must therefore learn to distinguish submission to lawful authority from participation in corruption, biblical rebuke from malicious slander, and truthful exposure from the reckless repetition of accusations. Ephesians 5:11 commands believers to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” That command does not authorize every unverified political rumor, every dishonest accusation, or every hateful attack against public officials. It requires separation from wickedness and truthful confrontation of what Scripture condemns. The believer must be willing to oppose corruption even when doing so costs him friendships, professional opportunities, financial advantage, or political approval. Yet he must never become a liar while attempting to expose another liar. This study will examine governmental bribery, judicial corruption, abuse of public money, dishonest decrees, political favoritism, the responsibilities of Christian officeholders, and the price of telling the truth when powerful men would rather purchase silence. The Bible does not command Christians to bow before corruption, and it certainly does not permit them to practice corruption while pretending to defend righteousness.

1. When Wicked Men Rule, Ordinary People Pay the Price

Proverbs 29:2 establishes a distinction that political propaganda cannot erase: righteous government benefits the people, while wicked government brings suffering. Notice that the verse does not measure righteousness by popularity, wealth, military strength, or the ability to deliver an impressive speech. A wicked ruler may possess considerable public support and still govern wickedly. A righteous official may make unpopular decisions and still fulfill his responsibilities faithfully. The moral character of government is not determined by how many people applaud its representatives. God's standard is righteousness. The proverb

belongs to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and it must not be converted into a national covenant promise guaranteeing that every modern country will prosper whenever Christians win elections. Nevertheless, its moral observation remains unmistakable. When rulers practice justice, honesty, and restraint, people benefit. When those entrusted with authority become thieves, liars, and oppressors, the consequences reach far beyond the men occupying office.

Romans 13:3–4 explains the proper purpose of governmental authority. The ruler is described as "the minister of God to thee for good," and the passage identifies his responsibility to execute wrath upon those who do evil. That is what government is supposed to accomplish. It is entrusted with authority to restrain criminal wrongdoing, protect innocent people, and preserve civil order. But what happens when the man appointed to punish thieves becomes a thief himself? What happens when the official entrusted with protecting citizens begins exploiting them? What happens when the courtroom becomes an instrument for rewarding powerful wrongdoers and punishing people who cannot afford political influence? The institution remains legitimate, but its authority has been corrupted in practice. A dishonest policeman does not abolish the need for law enforcement, and a crooked judge does not prove that courts should disappear. Their misconduct demonstrates why those institutions require accountability. **Government was ordained to put restraints upon wickedness, not to provide wickedness with a pension, a title, and an office overlooking the city.**

The consequences of governmental corruption are not confined to political speeches or arguments among public officials. When public resources are stolen, legitimate services may suffer. When contracts are awarded through bribery rather than honest judgment, citizens may bear unnecessary costs. When officials protect powerful offenders, victims may lose confidence that the law will defend them. When false accusations are used against innocent people, reputations, livelihoods, and families can be destroyed. Proverbs 28:15 declares, "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." That is not the language of harmless administrative disagreement. It describes the destructive influence of wicked authority upon vulnerable people. The ruler who exploits those beneath him is not merely failing to demonstrate excellent leadership. He is violating the responsibility attached to his position. Political power magnifies the reach of a man's decisions, and when that man is dishonest, the damage can extend to people whose names he does not even know.

2. A Bribe in the Hand Can Blind a Man on the Bench

Proverbs 17:23 declares, "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment." There is governmental corruption described with enough precision to make a

dishonest official uncomfortable. The wicked man receives a secret gift for the purpose of twisting justice. The payment may be concealed, the agreement may be disguised, and the participants may employ respectable language, but the moral character of the transaction remains unchanged. It is bribery. Exodus 23:8 commands, “And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.” That command was given within Israel's national law under Moses, but its condemnation of dishonest influence exposes a moral principle that no modern government can afford to ignore. A judgment purchased with money is not justice. It is corruption wearing the clothing of lawful procedure.

The sons of Samuel demonstrate how quickly governmental responsibility can become a business opportunity for dishonest men. First Samuel 8:3 declares, “And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.” These men possessed positions of judicial responsibility, but they abandoned righteousness for financial gain. Notice the progression. They turned aside after lucre, accepted bribes, and corrupted judgment. Greed entered the heart before corruption appeared in the decision. The desire for dishonest gain produced dishonest administration. Their wrongdoing also contributed to the circumstances surrounding Israel's demand for a king. The people were confronted with officials whose conduct had undermined confidence in existing leadership. Yet the answer to corruption is not automatically found in changing the structure of government while leaving human wickedness untouched. A dishonest judge does not become righteous because his title changes. A thief seated behind a different desk remains a thief.

Second Chronicles 19:6 records Jehoshaphat's instruction to the judges of Judah: “Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.” Verse 7 adds that with the LORD there is no iniquity, respect of persons, or taking of gifts. That instruction belonged to the administration of Judah under its historical covenant setting, but the moral warning is unmistakable. Judicial authority carries serious responsibility before God. A judge who accepts money, favors, appointments, privileges, or personal benefits in exchange for dishonest treatment has sold something he was entrusted to preserve. The amount of the bribe does not determine whether the act is wicked. Neither does the sophistication of the arrangement. **A bribe does not become clean because it travels through three committees, two bank accounts, and a lawyer wearing an expensive suit.** The transaction remains corrupt when its purpose is to purchase improper influence over public duty.

3. When the Courts Protect the Guilty and Punish the Innocent

Isaiah 1:23 delivers a devastating accusation against corrupt leadership in Judah: “Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.” Notice how completely governmental responsibility had been reversed. Those entrusted with public authority had become companions of thieves. Those responsible for justice pursued dishonest rewards. Those obligated to protect vulnerable people neglected their causes. The passage belongs to Isaiah's prophetic condemnation of Judah's spiritual and national wickedness, not to a direct prophecy identifying a modern administration. Nevertheless, it reveals what God thinks about rulers who convert public service into private advantage. He does not admire their cleverness. He condemns their corruption. A government that provides favorable treatment to powerful wrongdoers while neglecting the defenseless has abandoned the moral purpose of justice.

Isaiah 10:1–2 continues the indictment: “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people.” Here the wrongdoing extends beyond isolated dishonest decisions to the writing of unjust decrees themselves. A law may be formally enacted and still violate righteousness. Governmental procedure does not possess the power to transform wickedness into holiness. Pharaoh's command to murder Hebrew children remained wicked despite his royal authority. Nebuchadnezzar's decree demanding worship of an image remained wicked despite the consequences attached to disobedience. Pilate's condemnation of the innocent Christ remained unjust despite the official proceedings surrounding it. The Bible never teaches that every government action becomes morally correct because someone followed the prescribed administrative steps. Official stationery can carry an unlawful command just as easily as a righteous one.

First Kings 21 provides a terrible illustration through the account of Naboth's vineyard. Ahab wanted property that Naboth refused to surrender because it belonged to his fathers' inheritance. Jezebel arranged a conspiracy in which false witnesses accused Naboth of blaspheming God and the king. The innocent man was condemned and killed, and Ahab obtained the property he desired. There was an accusation, there were witnesses, and there was a public proceeding, but the entire arrangement was corrupt. God sent Elijah to confront the king, declaring, “Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?” (1 Kings 21:19). There stands a question no official document could conceal. The king had used wickedness to acquire what was not his. **A courtroom does not become righteous merely because everyone stands when the judge enters. If the witnesses are liars and the verdict is purchased, the proceedings may be official, but the wickedness remains personal.**

4. The Public Treasury Is Not a Politician's Private Bank Account

Governmental corruption is not confined to envelopes of cash passed beneath a table. It may involve the deliberate misuse of public resources, dishonest contracts, improper favors, concealed conflicts of interest, fraudulent expenses, and official decisions designed to enrich particular individuals rather than fulfill legitimate public responsibilities. Public money is entrusted for public purposes under the law governing its collection and expenditure. The official responsible for administering those resources does not become their personal owner merely because he possesses authority over their distribution. Luke 16:10 declares, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” Although the Lord spoke those words within a broader teaching concerning stewardship, the principle exposes dishonesty wherever entrusted resources are involved. A man who cannot be trusted with a small responsibility does not become trustworthy when the amount increases and the office acquires a more impressive title.

Consider the difference between legitimate government spending and dishonest favoritism. Officials may disagree over public priorities, and reasonable people may differ concerning the wisdom of particular expenditures. A policy disagreement is not automatically evidence of theft. But when an official secretly arranges benefits in exchange for personal gain, conceals a financial interest, or deliberately manipulates a public decision for dishonest advantage, the matter becomes corruption. Proverbs 11:1 declares, “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.” The verse concerns dishonest measurement in commerce, yet the same hatred of deception applies to fraudulent financial dealings. Public service does not permit a different definition of honesty. A dishonest businessman cannot sanctify his fraud by opening a charitable foundation, and a dishonest politician cannot sanctify his misconduct by delivering a speech about serving the community.

The New Testament records a revealing example in Acts 24:26. Felix, who held Paul in custody, “hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.” The official possessed authority over the prisoner, yet he entertained the prospect of receiving money in connection with his release. Acts 24:27 further records that Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. There stands a ruler whose decisions were influenced by personal advantage and political considerations rather than straightforward justice. Paul had no need to manufacture a bribe to purchase what should have been handled honestly. The passage demonstrates how corruption can operate through the power to delay, release, punish, or withhold lawful treatment. Sometimes the corrupt official does not demand money openly. He merely makes it understood that justice will

move considerably faster after somebody discovers the proper financial incentive. **When justice requires a secret payment before it can recognize the truth, the courtroom has become a marketplace and righteousness has been placed on the auction block.**

5. God's Standard Does Not Change With the Political Party

Proverbs 24:23 declares, “It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.” That statement leaves no room for the Christian who condemns corruption only when it appears among political opponents. If bribery is wicked when committed by one official, it remains wicked when committed by another. If deliberately misleading the public is sinful when practiced by an opposing movement, it does not become righteous when performed by someone whose policies you favor. The standard is not determined by party affiliation, campaign promises, personal popularity, or the willingness of a politician to speak favorably about Christianity. The Christian must learn to judge conduct according to truth rather than allegiance. Political organizations are composed of fallible human beings, and no party possesses an exemption from the commandments of God. A voter may agree with an official's policies while still recognizing that the official has acted dishonestly. Supporting a particular proposal does not require defending every personal failure of the person presenting it.

Leviticus 19:15 commanded Israel, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.” Notice that the command condemns favoritism in both directions. A wealthy person must not receive special treatment because he possesses influence, and a poor person must not automatically prevail merely because his circumstances arouse sympathy. Righteous judgment requires the consideration of truth. The Christian should not presume guilt merely because a politician is wealthy, influential, unpopular, or associated with an opposing movement. Neither should he presume innocence because the accused person belongs to a group he admires. The moral principles established in Israel's law reveal God's opposition to dishonest partiality, even though the Church is not under Israel's national covenant. Justice cannot be properly administered when the conclusion is chosen before the evidence is examined.

This is where political hypocrisy becomes especially ugly among professing Christians. Some people will spend months demanding the public exposure of wrongdoing by opponents while immediately attacking anyone who raises a legitimate question concerning their favored officials. They claim to defend biblical morality, but their standard changes whenever the political circumstances become inconvenient. James 2:1 warns believers against having the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ “with respect of persons.” The immediate context concerns favoritism within the assembly, but the warning exposes the

danger of treating people differently because of worldly standing. Political loyalty should never become an excuse to abandon honesty. **If your definition of corruption changes when the name on the campaign sign changes, you are not defending righteousness. You are defending a team.** The Bible is not a campaign accessory, and God will not revise His commandments to accommodate anyone's political friendships.

6. Reprove the Works of Darkness Without Becoming a Liar

Ephesians 5:11 commands, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” The instruction was given to believers concerning their conduct as children of light. The surrounding passage contrasts the works of darkness with the fruit of the Spirit, identifying goodness, righteousness, and truth as characteristics of godly living. Therefore, reproving wickedness cannot legitimately involve abandoning truth. A Christian who exposes corruption must not participate in it, excuse it, or deliberately conceal wrongdoing for personal gain. Yet neither may he invent accusations to destroy someone he dislikes. The command to reprove darkness is not permission to become another worker of darkness. It is an obligation to bring truthful correction against what Scripture condemns. A lie employed against a dishonest official remains a lie. The fact that its target deserves criticism does not transform the falsehood into righteousness.

Proverbs 18:13 warns, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Verse 17 adds, “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.” Those verses ought to be read before every Christian forwards an accusation merely because it confirms what he already believes. A serious allegation requires evidence, context, and a willingness to examine competing accounts. Genuine whistleblowing involves reporting suspected wrongdoing through responsible means, preserving relevant evidence, and distinguishing what is personally known from what has merely been alleged. Gossip involves spreading damaging information without proper regard for truth, necessity, or the consequences of false accusation. A Christian may possess a legitimate reason to expose corruption, but he must not confuse suspicion with proof. **An accusation does not become evidence because ten thousand people repeat it, and a rumor does not become truth because somebody places a Bible verse beneath it.**

The practical response to corruption must therefore combine courage with restraint. A believer who discovers credible evidence of serious wrongdoing may have opportunities to report the matter to responsible authorities, seek lawful investigation, preserve records, pursue legitimate legal remedies, or speak publicly when appropriate and justified. The precise duty depends upon the circumstances, the evidence, and the responsibilities involved. But Scripture does not authorize threats, intimidation, fabricated documents,

malicious exaggeration, or private vengeance. Romans 12:19 commands, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.” Verse 21 adds, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Truthful exposure and personal revenge are different things. The Christian's purpose should be the correction of wrongdoing and the protection of those affected, not the satisfaction of humiliating an enemy. If corruption can be exposed only by committing another act of corruption, the method has already contradicted the message.

7. Christian Officeholders Must Remember Who Will Judge Them

Micah 6:8 declares, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” The historical setting concerns God's controversy with His covenant people, Israel, whose religious activities had failed to conceal their disobedience. Micah was not giving a modern political campaign speech or establishing salvation by works. He was confronting people who possessed religious privileges while neglecting righteousness. The moral application to public responsibility is powerful. A Christian occupying government office should administer his duties justly, treat others with proper mercy, and walk humbly before God. He should not imagine that a public prayer, a religious photograph, or a carefully selected Scripture quotation can excuse dishonest conduct. Religious language cannot cleanse a corrupt transaction. A man may carry the Bible into his office every morning and still violate its commandments before lunch.

Daniel provides a striking contrast to dishonest public servants. Daniel 6:4 records that officials seeking an accusation against him “could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.” His enemies could not establish corruption in his public responsibilities, so they attacked his devotion to God. Daniel served under Gentile governments while maintaining a testimony of integrity. The account does not turn Babylon or Medo-Persia into Christian nations, nor does it suggest that every believer must seek political office. It demonstrates that governmental responsibility can be exercised faithfully without surrendering obedience to God. A Christian public servant should be known for accurate records, honest decisions, responsible stewardship, and the refusal to participate in fraudulent arrangements. His professional standing should not depend upon hiding dishonesty behind political influence. The man who claims to be a servant of Christ should not require an investigator to persuade him that stealing public money is wrong.

Every position of authority also brings the possibility of pressure from others. An honest official may be encouraged to overlook misconduct, approve an improper arrangement, conceal inconvenient information, or remain silent because exposing wrongdoing could

damage his career. Such circumstances test whether his professed principles govern his actual conduct. Acts 5:29 establishes the higher responsibility: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” That declaration does not excuse irresponsible defiance of lawful duties, but it does establish that no superior has authority to command deliberate sin. A Christian officeholder must refuse participation in known wickedness even when doing so carries a personal cost. He should use appropriate lawful procedures, seek truthful resolution, and accept that integrity may prove expensive. Yet personal sacrifice does not make every accusation correct; evidence and righteousness still matter. **A man who sells his conscience to keep his government position has made a poor bargain. He may preserve his paycheck for a season, but he has surrendered something money cannot replace.**

Conclusion

The Scriptures leave no uncertainty concerning God's judgment of governmental corruption. Proverbs condemns wicked rulers, bribery, and partiality. Isaiah exposes officials who neglect the fatherless, oppress the vulnerable, and issue unrighteous decrees. Exodus forbids dishonest gifts that pervert judgment. Micah demands justice, mercy, and humility before God. The New Testament warns believers against fellowship with darkness and commands truthful conduct even when confronting evil. These passages do not establish that every government official is corrupt, every political disagreement constitutes wickedness, or every allegation against a public servant should be believed. They establish that civil authority remains accountable to righteousness. The Christian should respect legitimate government without pretending that governmental office makes a man morally infallible. A lawful institution can be corrupted by unlawful conduct, and the remedy requires truth rather than blind loyalty. The sword of government was entrusted for the restraint of evil, not for the enrichment of those willing to misuse it.

The Christian's responsibility is equally serious. He must not participate in bribery, falsify evidence, spread malicious accusations, or conceal wrongdoing merely because the guilty person belongs to a favored political movement. He may expose proven corruption, pursue lawful remedies, defend innocent people, demand honest administration, and speak firmly against wickedness without abandoning biblical restraint. He must also remember that the same standard applies to his own financial dealings, professional conduct, business decisions, and personal testimony. There is something deeply hypocritical about condemning a politician for dishonest accounting while maintaining fraudulent records in one's own business. The Christian who demands righteousness from government must not despise righteousness when it reaches his own doorstep. God has never established separate moral commandments for public officials and private citizens. Dishonesty is not

sanctified by political office, and neither is it excused by the absence of one. The man condemning corruption must be willing to live by the truth he proclaims.

One day every earthly official will surrender his office and stand before a higher authority. The corrupt judge will no longer possess a bench from which to silence objections. The dishonest politician will no longer control a public statement designed to conceal his conduct. The bribed official will no longer have influential friends capable of arranging another favorable decision. Ecclesiastes 12:14 declares, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” The believer's eternal salvation rests upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, not upon an impressive record of public service, but every Christian remains accountable for his conduct before the Lord. Let the judge administer justice, the official refuse dishonest gain, the citizen demand truth, and the Christian expose wickedness without becoming wicked himself. **A bribe may purchase an earthly verdict, but it cannot purchase divine approval. A crooked politician may escape an investigation, but he cannot escape the judgment of God. A corrupt court may bury the evidence, but heaven has never misplaced a record. And when the final Judge takes His seat, there will be no political favors, no dishonest witnesses, no concealed transactions, and no appeal to a higher court. The truth will stand when every earthly excuse has fallen.**

8 of 10 — The Christian and Government — We Ought to Obey God Rather Than Men: Where Submission Ends and Resistance Begins

Primary Scriptures: Acts 5:27–29; Acts 4:18–20; Daniel 3:16–18; Daniel 6:7–10; Exodus 1:15–21; Romans 13:1–7.

Introduction

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). There stands one of the most important declarations ever delivered before human authority, and it was not spoken by a disgruntled taxpayer arguing over his property assessment. The apostles had been commanded to stop preaching Jesus Christ, and they refused because the risen Saviour had already commanded them to proclaim His gospel. The issue was not personal convenience, political preference, or wounded pride. It was a direct collision between the commandments of Almighty God and the demands of men. Yet some Christians have taken those eight magnificent words and turned them into a universal excuse for doing whatever they please. They disobey an ordinary regulation, receive the predictable consequences, and immediately announce that they are suffering

persecution. Evidently, Daniel's lions' den and an unpaid parking ticket have somehow become equivalent experiences. The Bible makes no such comparison, and neither should we.

On the opposite side stands the religious gentleman who has memorized Romans 13:1 but apparently misplaced Acts 5:29. He insists that because God ordained civil government, every command issued by government must be obeyed without question. Pharaoh orders the destruction of innocent children, Nebuchadnezzar demands worship of his image, Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer, and the Jewish council commands the apostles to stop preaching Christ. According to this remarkable theology, every faithful servant should have saluted and complied. But the same God who inspired Romans 13 also inspired Acts 5, and He was not contradicting Himself. God ordained civil authority to restrain evil, administer justice, and preserve order. He did not commission earthly rulers to rewrite His commandments. A government official may possess genuine authority within his appointed jurisdiction while exceeding that authority through an unlawful or wicked command. The badge, crown, robe, or government seal does not transform disobedience to God into righteousness.

The Christian must therefore recognize a distinction that neither political rebellion nor governmental tyranny has any interest in preserving. Submission to legitimate authority is a biblical duty, but submission is not unlimited. Resistance to commands that directly contradict God's Word may become necessary, but resistance is not automatically righteous merely because somebody waves a Bible while refusing to cooperate. The dividing line is established by Scripture, not personal anger, patriotic enthusiasm, popular opinion, or the shifting political preferences of the day. This study will examine the apostles before the council, the Hebrew midwives before Pharaoh, the three Hebrew children before Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel before the decree of Darius. It will distinguish faithful obedience from lawless defiance, conviction from stubbornness, and courageous resistance from the fleshly desire to fight authority. The Christian is not commissioned to spend his life looking for a revolution. Neither is he commanded to surrender the Word of God whenever Caesar develops an appetite for divine authority.

1. The Apostles Were Ordered to Stop Preaching, Not to Stop Complaining

Acts 5:27 records that the apostles were brought before the council, where the high priest questioned them concerning their continued preaching. The accusation in verse 28 was unmistakable: “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” Notice the issue. The apostles were not being questioned because they disliked the government, refused lawful taxation, or attempted to overthrow the established civil order. They were proclaiming Jesus Christ after receiving a direct prohibition against doing so. The

religious authorities objected because the message exposed their rejection of the Messiah and declared that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead. They wanted silence where God had commanded witness. The conflict therefore concerned a clear obligation imposed by the Lord Himself. The apostles did not manufacture persecution by behaving foolishly. They encountered opposition because they continued doing precisely what their Saviour had commanded.

Acts 4:18–20 had already established the dispute. Peter and John were commanded “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Their answer was direct: “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” There was no complicated theological escape route hidden inside those words. God had given a command, men had issued a contrary command, and the apostles recognized which authority was supreme. The council possessed genuine religious and judicial influence within Jewish society, although it was not identical to the Roman civil government described in Romans 13. That distinction should be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the governing principle extends to every human authority that attempts to forbid obedience to God. No council, ruler, magistrate, employer, or earthly institution possesses the authority to cancel a divine commandment.

Observe also the character of the apostles' response. They did not organize an armed rebellion against the council, threaten the officers who arrested them, or begin murdering people because their preaching had been opposed. They continued proclaiming Christ and accepted the consequences of that obedience. Acts 5:40 records that they were beaten and commanded again not to speak in the name of Jesus. Verse 41 declares that they departed “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Their courage was demonstrated through faithful witness, not uncontrolled retaliation. Some modern Christians seem to believe that boldness consists of making the largest possible disturbance and then claiming persecution when somebody objects. The apostles demonstrated something considerably greater. They obeyed God when obedience became costly. **The test of Christian courage is not how loudly a man can challenge authority, but whether he remains faithful when authority commands him to abandon the truth.**

2. Romans 13 Establishes Authority, but It Does Not Make Tyrants Infallible

Romans 13:1 declares, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” That command must be accepted without attempting to explain it away. Civil government is a legitimate institution established under God's providential authority. Romans 13:3–4 explains its purpose: the ruler is to restrain wrongdoing and serve as “the minister of God to thee for good.” Verse 4

adds that he bears the sword as “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The passage does not describe government as an independent deity possessing unlimited jurisdiction. It describes an institution entrusted with particular responsibilities. God authorizes civil government to preserve order and administer justice, not to demand idolatry, commit murder, or forbid obedience to Himself. The existence of governmental authority is divine in origin; the wickedness of particular rulers remains their own responsibility.

The immediate context makes the distinction even clearer. Romans 12:19 forbids believers to avenge themselves, while Romans 13 recognizes civil authority's responsibility to administer lawful punishment. A private citizen is not permitted to appoint himself judge and executioner because he has become angry with another person. Government possesses responsibilities that individuals do not. Consequently, a Christian cannot invoke Acts 5:29 merely because a law inconveniences him, a regulation costs money, or an elected official holds opinions he dislikes. Romans 13:6–7 specifically commands believers to pay tribute and render proper honour. The man who refuses a legitimate obligation and then compares himself with the apostles has not demonstrated biblical courage. He has demonstrated considerable talent for finding heroic explanations for ordinary disobedience. **If every inconvenience becomes persecution, the word persecution eventually loses its meaning, and genuine suffering for Christ becomes harder to distinguish from personal foolishness.**

Nevertheless, God's establishment of governmental authority does not mean He approves every command issued beneath it. John 19:11 records the Lord Jesus telling Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” Pilate possessed real authority, but his condemnation of the sinless Christ remained unjust. The Lord's statement concerning the greater sin of those who delivered Him did not make Pilate innocent. Likewise, the Hebrew midwives were not obligated to commit murder because Pharaoh occupied a throne. Governmental authority is delegated authority, and delegated authority remains accountable to the One who established it. First Peter 2:17 commands, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” Notice the distinction. Honour the king, but fear God. The Christian respects lawful government because God commands it, and he refuses governmental commands to sin for precisely the same reason.

3. The Hebrew Midwives Feared God More Than Pharaoh

Exodus 1:15–16 records Pharaoh's command to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. The king instructed them concerning the birth of Hebrew children, ordering that the male children be killed while the daughters were permitted to live. This was not a questionable

administrative regulation or an unpopular government policy involving legitimate civil responsibilities. It was an order to murder innocent infants. Pharaoh was attempting to accomplish through the midwives what his fear of Israel's increasing population had produced in his wicked heart. He possessed the throne of Egypt, commanded its institutions, and exercised tremendous power over the people living under his government. Yet none of that authority made his command righteous. A royal decree ordering murder remains murder. The command does not become holy because the king speaks it, and the victim does not become guilty because the government considers his existence inconvenient.

Exodus 1:17 delivers the decisive answer: “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.” There was the proper boundary of submission. The midwives recognized a moral obligation greater than Pharaoh's command. Their fear of God produced refusal to participate in the destruction of innocent children. The passage does not establish that they rejected every Egyptian law or considered themselves exempt from ordinary responsibilities. It establishes that they refused a specific command requiring wickedness. Pharaoh could command the machinery of his government, but he could not alter the moral character of murdering children. Some people seem to imagine that official orders somehow transfer guilt away from the person carrying them out. Scripture teaches otherwise. **A murder does not become righteous when the government approves it, and an innocent child does not lose the image of God because a ruler has decided that his life is politically inconvenient.**

The historical setting must remain intact. These events occurred before the exodus, before the giving of the Mosaic law at Sinai, and long before the establishment of the New Testament Church. They concern God's providential preservation of Israel amid Egyptian oppression. The Christian must not confuse that covenant history with his own position in the body of Christ. Nevertheless, the account reveals a moral principle that reaches beyond Egypt: no earthly authority may command participation in wickedness and demand that obedience be considered righteous. Exodus 1:20 declares, “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives,” and verse 21 explains that because they feared God, He made them houses. The passage also records their answer to Pharaoh, but the approval explicitly emphasized by Scripture concerns their fear of God and preservation of life. The Christian should be careful not to convert every detail of a historical account into a universal permission for deception. The unmistakable lesson is that God was honoured by their refusal to obey a murderous command.

4. Three Hebrew Boys Refused to Bow, Even Without a Guarantee of Rescue

Daniel 3 records Nebuchadnezzar's construction of a golden image and his command that the assembled peoples, nations, and languages fall down and worship it. The decree was backed by the threat of immediate execution in a burning fiery furnace. Here was government extending its authority beyond the administration of civil affairs into the worship owed to God. The king was not merely requiring public order or lawful submission. He was commanding idolatry. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced a choice between obedience to the earthly monarch and obedience to the LORD. Their response in Daniel 3:16 was remarkable: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.” They were not confused about the command, and they were not searching for some clever arrangement that would allow them to bow outwardly while claiming loyalty to God inwardly. They understood the issue, and they refused.

Their declaration continued: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Daniel 3:17). Then came one of the strongest statements of faithfulness in the Old Testament: “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:18). Those words destroy the notion that biblical obedience depends upon guaranteed earthly success. The three men knew God possessed power to deliver them, but they refused to make deliverance the condition of their faithfulness. They would not worship the image even if obedience brought death. Some modern religious teaching promises that standing for God will always preserve comfort, employment, reputation, and financial security. The Hebrew children had no such bargain. Their position was settled before they discovered whether the furnace would consume them.

God miraculously delivered these men, and Daniel 3:25 records the king's astonishment when he saw four men walking unharmed in the fire, with the appearance of the fourth described as “like the Son of God.” But the miracle must not be turned into a promise that every faithful believer will escape physical suffering. Hebrews 11 records servants of God who suffered terribly, and Church history likewise demonstrates that obedience may bring death rather than earthly rescue. The events in Daniel concerned Jewish captives under Gentile authority and have a distinct historical and prophetic setting. They do not commission the Church to establish an earthly kingdom through rebellion. They demonstrate that worship belongs to God even when a ruler demands it for himself or his image. **A king may build a golden idol tall enough to impress an empire, but he cannot make one ounce of that gold worthy of worship. The height of an image does not determine the height of its authority.**

5. Daniel Kept Praying When Prayer Became a Crime

Daniel 6 presents a different method of persecution. The enemies of Daniel could find no corruption in his governmental service, so they designed a decree targeting his devotion to God. Daniel 6:7 records the proposal that whoever asked a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of King Darius, should be cast into the den of lions. The conspirators understood that Daniel's faithfulness to the LORD provided the only practical means of bringing an accusation against him. They therefore sought to turn his religious obedience into a punishable offense. Notice the wickedness of the arrangement. Daniel had not been stealing public money, falsifying governmental records, or abusing his office. He was a faithful servant whose enemies needed a law specifically designed to make righteousness unlawful. When wicked men cannot find a legitimate offense, they sometimes attempt to manufacture one by corrupting the law itself.

Daniel 6:10 declares, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.” The final words deserve particular attention: “as he did aforetime.” Daniel did not suddenly discover prayer after the government prohibited it. He was already praying. He did not invent a theatrical religious performance for the purpose of attracting attention. He continued the established practice of his devotion to God. His windows opened toward Jerusalem, reflecting his identity as a Jewish exile and the covenant promises associated with that city. The Christian must preserve that historical setting rather than pretending every feature of Daniel's prayer practice constitutes a direct Church Age command. Nevertheless, Daniel's refusal to abandon worship under governmental pressure provides a powerful example of obedience to higher authority.

Daniel did not threaten to overthrow Darius, assault the men who accused him, or organize an armed uprising. He continued praying, and the consequences followed. He was cast into the lions' den, where God delivered him according to the account in Daniel 6. The point is not that every believer will receive the same miraculous deliverance. The point is that Daniel did not surrender obedience to God merely because the government attached a penalty to it. The distinction between Daniel and the ordinary political agitator is plain. Daniel had a settled duty before God, a clear conflict with an unjust decree, and a willingness to suffer rather than compromise. He was not searching for a cause to make himself famous. **When Daniel's enemies made prayer illegal, Daniel did not need a new religion, a new attitude, or a new publicity campaign. He simply continued doing what he had been doing before the king signed the paper.**

6. A Biblical Conscience Is Not the Same Thing as a Stubborn Opinion

One of the most dangerous abuses of Acts 5:29 occurs when Christians replace the commandments of God with their own preferences and then demand that everyone treat those preferences as divine revelation. A conscience must be governed by Scripture, not merely by personal intensity. A man may sincerely believe a regulation is foolish, a tax is excessive, a government official is dishonest, or a policy is poorly designed. He may possess good reasons for those conclusions. But sincerity does not automatically establish a direct conflict with God's commandments. Romans 13 still requires submission to legitimate authority, and Titus 3:1 instructs believers "to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." The Christian who ignores those passages whenever government becomes inconvenient is not rightly dividing the Word. He is dividing the Bible into verses he enjoys and verses he would rather not obey.

A genuine conflict must be identified with care. When government commands the believer to participate in idolatry, deliberately shed innocent blood, deny Christ, or abandon a clear duty imposed by God, obedience to the government would require disobedience to Scripture. But ordinary disagreements concerning taxes, licensing, traffic regulations, public administration, or political priorities do not automatically establish that conflict. Some matters involve difficult questions of law, conscience, competing responsibilities, and factual circumstances that demand careful examination. Christians must distinguish actual commands from rumors, legal requirements from voluntary requests, and direct participation in sin from mere association with people who do not share their beliefs. The Bible does not authorize believers to manufacture certainty where Scripture has not spoken. **The man who calls every personal preference a biblical conviction eventually leaves himself with a religion in which God agrees with him about absolutely everything. That is not submission to Scripture. It is self-government wearing a theological hat.**

The Christian may also use legitimate legal protections without becoming rebellious. Acts 16:37 records Paul challenging the unlawful treatment he and Silas received after being beaten openly and uncondemned as Roman citizens. Acts 25:11 records Paul's declaration, "I appeal unto Caesar." Paul did not regard the use of lawful legal remedies as disobedience to God. Neither did he assume that every unfavorable governmental decision required violent resistance. The believer may question an official determination, seek judicial review, petition for correction, report unlawful conduct, and pursue peaceful remedies while maintaining respect for legitimate civil authority. Such actions may be especially important when a government improperly restricts religious exercise or punishes innocent people. Yet the Christian should proceed truthfully and responsibly, refusing threats, fabricated evidence, or needless provocation. The strongest biblical position does

not become stronger when the person defending it abandons honesty. Courage and lawful restraint are not enemies.

7. Obeying God May Cost You More Than You Expected

Second Timothy 3:12 declares, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” That verse does not promise every Christian the same degree of suffering, but it destroys the idea that faithfulness guarantees earthly approval. The apostles were beaten, imprisoned, and threatened. Daniel faced the lions' den. The Hebrew children faced the fiery furnace. The Hebrew midwives risked the anger of Pharaoh. These servants did not receive a guarantee that obedience would preserve every earthly advantage. The Christian who refuses a command requiring sin may face dismissal, financial hardship, social rejection, legal proceedings, or imprisonment. Such consequences do not automatically prove that his conduct was righteous; a man can suffer for wrongdoing as well. But when suffering genuinely results from faithful obedience to God, earthly punishment does not transform that obedience into sin. The believer's duty is determined by the Lord's command, not by the comfort attached to obeying it.

First Peter 2:20 asks, “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” Peter establishes a distinction that modern discussions of persecution frequently overlook. Suffering because one has committed wrongdoing is not the same thing as suffering for righteousness. A Christian arrested for fraud cannot transform his sentence into persecution by carrying a Bible into the courtroom. A believer punished for threatening officials cannot automatically claim the apostles as his example. First Peter 4:15 warns against suffering as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or busybody in other men's matters. Verse 16 then declares, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” The distinction is crucial. The cause of suffering matters. The Christian must not confuse the consequences of his own wickedness with the honor of suffering for Christ.

The Church must also remember that its mission is not to establish the earthly kingdom of Christ through political rebellion. John 18:36 records the Lord's declaration, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The promised literal reign of Jesus Christ remains future, and the Church has not been commissioned to bring it into existence through revolution. Christians are ambassadors for Christ, entrusted with the gospel of reconciliation. That commission does not prohibit responsible citizenship, lawful resistance to unjust commands, or the defense of legitimate rights. It does prohibit confusing spiritual faithfulness with a campaign of violence designed to capture earthly government in the name of Jesus. Romans 12:21 commands, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” The Christian may refuse obedience to wicked commands while continuing to respect lawful institutions and

seek peace wherever possible. **The believer's testimony is not measured by how much trouble he can cause Caesar, but by how faithfully he obeys Christ when Caesar causes trouble for him.**

Conclusion

Romans 13 and Acts 5 belong in the same Bible because they teach complementary truths concerning human authority and divine obedience. Romans 13 establishes that civil government is ordained of God and that believers are responsible for submitting to legitimate authority. Acts 5 establishes that human authorities cannot lawfully command believers to disobey Almighty God. The Hebrew midwives demonstrate that a ruler's command cannot justify murdering innocent children. The three Hebrew children demonstrate that governmental power cannot demand worship belonging exclusively to God. Daniel demonstrates that a royal decree cannot cancel faithful obedience to the LORD. The apostles demonstrate that the gospel must be proclaimed even when earthly authorities forbid its preaching. None of these accounts authorizes Christians to abandon ordinary civil responsibilities whenever they encounter inconvenience. Neither does any require believers to obey wicked commands merely because those commands arrive through established institutions. The Bible draws the boundary clearly, and the Christian must not erase it for political advantage.

The believer must therefore examine his conscience honestly before claiming the authority of Acts 5:29. Is the government actually commanding something God forbids, or is it merely requiring something he dislikes? Is he being prohibited from obeying a clear biblical command, or has he confused personal preference with divine obligation? Has he examined the facts, understood the actual requirement, and considered legitimate lawful remedies? Is his response characterized by truth, restraint, and a willingness to suffer for righteousness, or by anger, pride, and a desire to strike back? These questions matter because the Christian's testimony can be damaged by both cowardly compromise and reckless rebellion. God has not called His people to become servants of governmental wickedness, but neither has He authorized them to disregard lawful authority whenever obedience becomes inconvenient. The servant of Christ should be reliable in ordinary civil responsibilities and immovable when directly commanded to sin. Both qualities arise from submission to the same Lord.

One day every earthly ruler will surrender his authority, every government decree will lose its power, and every human throne will stand beneath the judgment of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:10–11 declares that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Until that day, Christians must live faithfully under imperfect governments, respecting legitimate authority

without surrendering the supremacy of God's Word. Let the believer pay his lawful obligations, honour public office, pray for rulers, seek peace, and refuse needless rebellion. But when men command what God forbids or forbid what God commands, let him stand upon Scripture with the courage of the apostles, the faithfulness of Daniel, and the conviction of the Hebrew children. **Caesar may command the affairs of his kingdom, but he cannot command the throne of heaven. He may write a decree, but he cannot rewrite the Word of God. He may threaten the believer's liberty, livelihood, or life, but he cannot purchase the believer's obedience to wickedness. Respect the sword God placed in Caesar's hand, but never surrender the conscience that belongs to Christ. When obedience to men becomes disobedience to God, the Christian's answer must remain what it was before the council: "We ought to obey God rather than men."**

9 of 10 — The Christian and Government — When Caesar Turns on the Church: Persecution, Prison, and Faithfulness Under Fire

Primary Scriptures: Acts 4:1–21; Acts 5:40–42; Acts 12:1–5; Acts 16:22–40; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12–16; Revelation 2:10.

Introduction

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide" (Acts 4:3). There stands the response of religious authority to the preaching of Jesus Christ in the opening chapters of Acts. Peter and John had not robbed a bank, murdered a citizen, organized an armed rebellion, or attempted to overthrow the government. A lame man had been healed, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was being proclaimed, and the religious authorities could not stand what they were hearing. Their solution was simple enough: arrest the preachers and lock them up. Apparently, if they could not answer the message, they would silence the messengers. That particular method of theological debate has been practiced for centuries by men who discover that their arguments are considerably weaker than their prison walls. But there is a serious lesson in the account. Earthly authorities may possess the power to arrest a believer, yet they do not possess the authority to cancel a commandment given by Almighty God.

There is an opposite problem among modern Christians that must be confronted before proceeding. Some believers have become so eager to identify persecution that practically every inconvenience qualifies. A government official disagrees with them, a permit application is rejected for legitimate reasons, a lawful penalty is imposed for actual misconduct, or a business dispute ends unfavorably, and suddenly somebody announces

that the days of Nero have returned. Not every fine is persecution, not every courtroom defeat is an assault upon Christianity, and not every disagreement with a public official qualifies a man for the company of the apostles. First Peter 4:15 warns believers against suffering as murderers, thieves, evildoers, or busybodies in other men's matters. That verse ought to receive considerable attention from Christians who mistake personal irresponsibility for spiritual courage. The Bible promises opposition to godly living, but it does not promise that every Christian who gets himself into trouble is suffering for righteousness.

Nevertheless, genuine governmental persecution is no imaginary danger. The book of Acts records preachers threatened, beaten, imprisoned, and commanded to stop proclaiming Jesus Christ. James was killed with the sword. Peter was chained between soldiers. Paul and Silas were beaten and placed in prison. These were not men manufacturing controversies to attract attention. They were servants of God carrying out the commission entrusted to them by their risen Saviour. Their experiences establish the Christian's responsibility when government attempts to prohibit obedience to Scripture, suppress the gospel, or punish believers for remaining faithful to Christ. They also demonstrate that courage does not require recklessness, that lawful appeals are not spiritual compromise, and that imprisonment does not mean God has abandoned His servants. The Church is not commissioned to overthrow civil government, but neither is it commissioned to surrender the truth whenever government threatens punishment. **Caesar may close a prison door upon a preacher, but he cannot close the mouth of Almighty God.**

1. The First Prisoners Were Guilty of Preaching the Resurrection

Acts 4 opens immediately after the healing of the lame man at the temple in Acts 3. Peter had proclaimed that the miracle was accomplished through the name of Jesus Christ, whom the people had rejected and whom God had raised from the dead. The message exposed the guilt of those responsible for rejecting their Messiah while offering the hope of repentance and the fulfillment of God's promises. Acts 4:1–2 records that the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon the apostles, “Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” Notice the stated objection. The apostles were teaching biblical truth concerning the risen Christ, and the religious authorities found that intolerable. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, so the apostles' preaching struck directly at their doctrine. When false religion cannot overthrow the truth by Scripture, it frequently discovers a sudden enthusiasm for using authority to suppress the man preaching it.

The next day, Peter and John stood before rulers, elders, scribes, and members of the high-priestly family. They were questioned concerning the power and name by which the lame

man had been healed. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, answered without apology that the miracle had been performed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead. Then came Acts 4:12: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” There was the issue that no council could settle through a vote. Salvation was not available through their religious authority, Jewish ancestry, personal righteousness, or the ceremonial machinery of the temple. It was found exclusively in Jesus Christ. The apostles were not merely defending freedom to express an opinion. They were declaring the only Saviour of sinners, and that message would not be revised to satisfy the religious establishment.

Acts 4:18 records that the council commanded the apostles “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Peter and John answered, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” They continued, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19–20). That is the dividing line between legitimate submission and necessary resistance. The apostles were not refusing an ordinary civil obligation because they disliked the men enforcing it. They were refusing a direct prohibition against fulfilling the commission of Jesus Christ. Their resistance remained focused upon obedience to God rather than personal revenge against their accusers. The council could threaten punishment, but it could not revoke the Lord's authority. **When men command silence where God has commanded preaching, the preacher does not need permission from the men to obey the God who sent him.**

2. They Beat the Apostles, but They Could Not Beat the Gospel Out of Them

Acts 5 records another confrontation between the apostles and the religious authorities. The preaching continued, miracles were performed, and the high priest and those associated with him became filled with indignation. The apostles were imprisoned, but an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and commanded them to return to the temple and speak “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). Their instructions were not to organize a political rebellion, assemble weapons, or retaliate against the officers who had arrested them. They were to continue proclaiming the Word of God. The religious authorities eventually discovered that their prisoners were no longer inside the prison but were standing in the temple teaching the people. There is something almost humorous about the scene. The government had the building, the guards, and the authority to lock the doors, yet the prisoners had apparently neglected to cooperate with the official arrangements.

When the apostles were brought before the council again, the high priest complained that they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine. That accusation was probably one of the finest compliments the apostles received from their enemies. Imagine being charged with

spreading the truth of Jesus Christ so thoroughly that an entire city had heard the message! Peter and the other apostles answered in Acts 5:29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” The issue remained unchanged. Their Lord had commanded them to preach, and earthly authorities had commanded them to stop. After Gamaliel's intervention, the council beat the apostles, renewed the prohibition, and released them. Acts 5:41 declares, “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Their joy did not mean the beating was imaginary or painless. It meant their allegiance to Christ was greater than their fear of suffering.

Acts 5:42 provides the remarkable conclusion: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” The council had issued orders, inflicted punishment, and attempted to intimidate the witnesses, but the preaching continued. Nevertheless, Christians must not misuse this account to glorify recklessness or deliberately provoke punishment for personal recognition. The apostles were fulfilling a clear divine commission, not attempting to become famous through their arrests. Their suffering resulted from faithfulness rather than theatrical confrontation. There is an enormous difference between being persecuted for preaching Christ and creating a disturbance so that one can later announce how badly the authorities behaved. **A preacher who is arrested for preaching the gospel may have suffered for Christ; a preacher arrested for committing an ordinary crime has not improved his case by carrying a Bible into the police station.** The cause of the suffering matters.

3. Herod Had the Sword, but the Church Had Access to Heaven

Acts 12 introduces a darker development in the persecution of believers. Herod the king stretched forth his hands “to vex certain of the church,” and Acts 12:2 declares, “And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” Here was an earthly ruler using his authority to kill a servant of Jesus Christ. James was not guilty of committing some dreadful crime deserving execution. He was an apostle of the Lord, and Herod's action was an exercise of persecution. The following verse reveals that Herod saw the killing pleased certain Jewish opponents of the Church, so he proceeded to arrest Peter. Political advantage had become an incentive for further oppression. The king discovered that persecuting believers could win approval from influential people, and apparently that applause sounded better to him than the demands of righteousness. Yet public approval does not turn murder into justice, and a king's popularity cannot cleanse blood from his hands.

Peter was placed in prison and delivered to four quaternions of soldiers for safekeeping. Acts 12:5 then records one of the most important statements in the chapter: “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God

for him." The king had soldiers, chains, guards, and prison doors. The Church had access to the throne of grace. The believers did not possess Herod's governmental authority, but they could petition the God whose authority exceeded Herod's entire kingdom. The Lord sent an angel, Peter's chains fell from his hands, and he was led out of the prison. When Peter arrived at the house where believers were gathered in prayer, Rhoda recognized his voice and became so excited that she left him standing outside. The people praying for Peter initially struggled to believe he had actually arrived. Even faithful believers can become surprised when God answers the very prayer they have been offering.

But the chapter must not be turned into a promise that every imprisoned Christian will experience an angelic escape. James was killed, while Peter was delivered. Both were servants of the same Lord. Both belonged to the same apostolic company. Both were precious to God. Yet the outcomes were different. Scripture does not explain every detail of why the Lord permits one servant to die while delivering another from danger. Hebrews 11 records believers who escaped tremendous peril and others who suffered torture, imprisonment, and death. The Christian's faith must rest upon God's character rather than the assumption that faithfulness always produces immediate earthly rescue. The Church should pray earnestly for imprisoned believers, seek their lawful protection, assist their families, and trust the Lord with the outcome. **The same God who opened Peter's prison door received James when the sword fell. Deliverance is not the measure of divine faithfulness, and martyrdom is not evidence that heaven lost control.**

4. Paul and Silas Sang in Prison, Then Demanded an Answer From the Magistrates

Acts 16 records the imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi after Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a young woman whose masters had profited from her condition. When those masters realized that their financial gain had disappeared, they brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates. Their accusation emphasized public disorder and unlawful customs, and the multitude rose against the missionaries. The magistrates commanded them to be beaten, and Acts 16:23 declares that after laying many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison. The keeper was charged to hold them safely, so he placed them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. The apostles were not imprisoned for committing fraud or attacking innocent citizens. Their ministry had interfered with the profits of men who were willing to manipulate the authorities to protect their business. When wickedness loses money, it sometimes discovers a remarkable interest in law enforcement.

Acts 16:25 declares, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Their backs had been beaten, their feet were secured, and they were confined inside a prison, yet their testimony had not been silenced. Suddenly an

earthquake shook the foundations, the doors opened, and the prisoners' bands were loosed. The jailer, fearing that the prisoners had escaped, prepared to kill himself, but Paul cried out that they were all present. The jailer then asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30–31). Salvation was not offered through prison reform, religious ceremonies, political allegiance, or good works. The message remained faith in Jesus Christ. A Roman jail became the setting in which a lost man heard the gospel.

The following morning, when the magistrates ordered their release, Paul did something that ought to trouble Christians who believe exercising legal rights demonstrates insufficient faith. He protested their unlawful treatment, saying, “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out” (Acts 16:37). Paul did not quietly pretend that the magistrates had acted properly. He asserted his Roman citizenship and required them to acknowledge what they had done. This was not revenge through violence; it was an appeal to legitimate legal protection. Christians may challenge unlawful detention, contest improper governmental actions, and seek available judicial remedies without betraying their testimony. **Paul could sing hymns at midnight and demand lawful accountability in the morning. Apparently, praising God and knowing your legal rights are not mutually exclusive activities.**

5. Not Every Punishment Is Persecution, and Not Every Prisoner Is a Martyr

Second Timothy 3:12 declares, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” The apostle was writing to Timothy concerning faithful ministry in the midst of opposition, false teaching, and increasingly difficult circumstances. The statement warns believers that godliness may bring hostility from an ungodly world. It does not promise that every Christian will experience identical forms of suffering, nor does it establish that every unpleasant encounter with government is persecution. A believer may be ridiculed for his convictions, excluded from opportunities because of his faith, or face serious penalties for obeying a clear biblical command. Those possibilities deserve sober consideration. Yet the Christian should not exaggerate ordinary disagreement into martyrdom. There is no spiritual advantage in inventing enemies, multiplying grievances, or treating every person who questions a religious claim as a persecutor. Scripture provides enough genuine examples of suffering without our manufacturing additional ones.

First Peter 4:15 supplies the necessary correction: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.” Peter immediately continues, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” The distinction could hardly be clearer. Suffering

because of criminal wrongdoing is not suffering for Jesus Christ merely because the offender professes Christianity. A dishonest businessman does not become a martyr when prosecuted for fraud. A reckless person does not become an apostle when held accountable for endangering others. A preacher who knowingly violates a legitimate law unrelated to his biblical obligations cannot automatically claim persecution when the law is enforced. **A jail cell does not become a missionary residence merely because the prisoner can quote Scripture, and a criminal sentence does not become a crown of righteousness because the defendant owns a King James Bible.**

Christians must examine the actual cause of governmental action rather than immediately assuming persecution. Was a believer punished for proclaiming the gospel or for committing an unrelated offense? Was a religious assembly specifically targeted because of its faith, or was a generally applicable safety requirement being enforced? Did an official command disobedience to Scripture, or did the Christian merely object to an inconvenient regulation? Were legitimate legal procedures available, and were they pursued truthfully? These questions matter because biblical conviction demands accuracy. The Christian should not deny genuine oppression merely because the government claims to be acting lawfully, but neither should he condemn legitimate enforcement merely because the person affected is religious. Proverbs 18:13 warns, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Truth must govern the examination. Persecution is serious precisely because it involves suffering for righteousness, not because every disagreement can be turned into a dramatic testimony.

6. When the Church Comes Under Fire, the Whole Body Has Responsibilities

Governmental persecution does not concern only the pastor standing before an official or the believer sitting inside a prison. It affects families, congregations, children, elderly members, and others whose lives are connected to those suffering. Acts 12 demonstrates that the Church prayed together while Peter remained imprisoned. Hebrews 13:3 commands, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” Believers should not treat imprisoned Christians as distant subjects for occasional emotional speeches while neglecting practical opportunities to assist them. Where legitimate persecution occurs, the Church may have responsibilities involving prayer, material support, care for affected families, legal assistance, and continued fellowship. A family deprived of its provider may need food, transportation, encouragement, and ordinary necessities. The Lord did not command His people merely to admire suffering from a comfortable distance. Galatians 6:2 declares, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

Pastors carry particular responsibilities when governmental hostility threatens the ordinary work of the local church. They must preach the Word faithfully, teach sound doctrine, prepare believers to distinguish legitimate authority from unlawful commands, and refuse to manipulate fear for personal influence. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” That instruction does not expire because preaching becomes unpopular. Yet a pastor must also exercise wisdom, care for the congregation, and avoid needless provocation that exposes families to danger without accomplishing a biblical duty. Jesus instructed His disciples in Matthew 10:16 to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” The immediate mission in that chapter concerned Israel, but the combination of prudence and harmlessness remains instructive. A courageous pastor does not have to become a reckless pastor, and a faithful church does not have to manufacture a crisis to demonstrate conviction.

The Church must also refuse the temptation to answer persecution through wickedness. Romans 12:19 commands believers not to avenge themselves, and verse 21 declares, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Christians may challenge unlawful restrictions, seek legal protection, petition authorities, and expose documented injustice without resorting to threats, fabricated accusations, or violence against innocent people. They may also assist believers who have been mistreated while refusing to excuse genuine misconduct committed by members of their own congregations. The standard must remain righteousness rather than loyalty to a particular individual. A church that protects wrongdoing because the offender is a preacher has abandoned justice. A church that remains silent when faithful believers are punished for obeying Christ has neglected its brethren. **The local church is not a political militia, a publicity machine, or a retirement home for frightened convictions. It is a body of believers commanded to stand in truth, love one another, and faithfully proclaim Jesus Christ.**

7. Caesar Can Bind the Messenger, but He Cannot Bind the Word of God

Second Timothy 2:9 contains one of the most triumphant declarations in the New Testament. Paul writes concerning the gospel, “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.” There stands the difference between the limitations of human authority and the power of divine revelation. Paul could be arrested, chained, confined, and treated as a criminal, but the gospel did not become false because its messenger was imprisoned. The Word of God was not dependent upon Paul's personal liberty for its authority. The apostle's imprisonment could restrict his movements, but it could not revoke the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That truth should strengthen believers facing genuine hostility. The government may restrict particular

activities, imprison a preacher, or confiscate possessions, but it cannot change one word of what God has declared. **Caesar may lock the preacher behind iron bars, but he has never manufactured a lock capable of fastening the mouth of Almighty God.**

Revelation 2:10 records the Lord's words to the church in Smyrna: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” The passage belongs to the specific message addressed to Smyrna, and its details should not be carelessly transferred into a universal promise that every persecuted Christian will suffer for exactly ten days. The seven churches possess their historical setting, with lessons extending to believers who study the Lord's words. The promise of a crown must not be confused with the means of eternal salvation. The believer is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by surviving imprisonment or earning salvation through martyrdom. Faithful service and eternal life must be distinguished. The Lord encourages perseverance amid suffering, not confidence in human achievement as a substitute for His finished work.

The Christian's ultimate hope therefore rests beyond earthly courts, prison walls, and governmental decrees. Philippians 3:20 declares that our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour. The Church awaits the Lord Jesus Christ, not the arrival of a political administration capable of establishing His kingdom through legislation. The Rapture of the Church and the future visible Second Advent must remain distinct, and Israel's promised earthly kingdom must not be confused with the present commission of the body of Christ. Until the Lord fulfills His purposes, believers remain responsible for faithful witness under whatever legitimate governments they inhabit. Some will enjoy unusual liberty; others will endure serious hostility. Neither circumstance changes the gospel. The blood of martyrs does not purchase salvation, and the suffering of faithful witnesses does not add anything to Christ's finished sacrifice. Their endurance demonstrates the worth of the Saviour who has already redeemed them. Earthly rulers may change the conditions of Christian service, but they cannot change its eternal foundation.

Conclusion

The book of Acts demonstrates that governmental and religious persecution of faithful believers is neither imaginary nor insignificant. Peter and John were imprisoned because they proclaimed the resurrection. The apostles were beaten because they refused to stop preaching Jesus Christ. James was killed by Herod, while Peter was imprisoned and later delivered through divine intervention. Paul and Silas were beaten at Philippi, yet their testimony continued inside the prison, and Paul later asserted the lawful protections associated with his Roman citizenship. These accounts establish a balanced biblical

response to persecution. Christians must obey God when human authorities directly forbid what He commands, but they are not authorized to abandon legitimate civil responsibilities or indulge unlawful retaliation. They may use lawful remedies without compromising faith, endure suffering without surrendering hope, and resist wicked commands without becoming violent revolutionaries. The Church's commission is not to overthrow Caesar. It is to proclaim Jesus Christ faithfully even when Caesar objects.

The distinction between genuine persecution and ordinary legal accountability must remain equally clear. First Peter 4 forbids believers to glorify suffering caused by their own wrongdoing, while encouraging those who suffer as Christians not to be ashamed. The believer who is punished for fraud, theft, violence, or deliberate lawlessness cannot automatically claim the honor belonging to those who suffer for righteousness. Yet no government may legitimately command the denial of Christ, prohibit obedience to a clear divine command, or demand participation in wickedness and then expect Christians to treat compliance as spiritual duty. The Christian must examine the facts, understand the command, seek appropriate lawful remedies, and maintain truthfulness throughout his response. Pastors must preach faithfully, churches must care for persecuted brethren, families must be supported, and believers must refuse to surrender their testimony merely to preserve personal convenience. Courage is not recklessness, and prudence is not cowardice. Both must remain governed by the Word of God.

Every earthly ruler will eventually surrender his authority, every prison will lose its power over those who have departed this life, and every human judgment will stand beneath the final authority of Jesus Christ. The believer's salvation does not depend upon whether government approves his preaching, recognizes his convictions, or permits him to enjoy earthly comfort. It rests upon the blood of the sinless Saviour who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Therefore, let the Christian honour legitimate government, obey lawful commands, pray for rulers, and seek peace wherever possible. But when human authority demands disobedience to Almighty God, let him remain faithful without surrendering righteousness to hatred or fear. Let the imprisoned preacher remember Paul's declaration that the Word of God is not bound. Let the persecuted congregation remember that heaven has not forgotten its suffering. And let every ruler remember that his earthly authority remains temporary. **Caesar may confiscate a Bible, but he cannot erase the Word of God. He may imprison a preacher, but he cannot imprison the gospel. He may silence a witness for a season, but he cannot silence the testimony of the empty tomb. The prison door will eventually open, whether through earthly deliverance or the believer's departure into the presence of Christ. And when Caesar's throne has crumbled into dust, the Lord Jesus Christ will still be KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**

10 of 10 — The Christian and Government — Caesar Has His Throne, but Christ Has the Final Word

Primary Scriptures: John 18:36; Matthew 22:21; Philippians 3:20; Daniel 2:44; Romans 13:1–7; Revelation 11:15; Revelation 19:11–16.

Introduction

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). There stood the Lord Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate, the representative of the mightiest earthly empire of that day, declaring a truth that has outlived every Caesar who ever wore a crown. Pilate possessed Roman authority, soldiers, a judgment seat, and the power to pronounce an earthly sentence. Christ stood before him as a prisoner, yet the apparent weakness of the accused concealed the infinite authority of the Son of God. The governor could issue orders to soldiers, but he could not command the stars. He could pronounce a sentence, but he could not forgive sins. He could occupy an earthly judgment seat, but he would eventually answer before the One standing in front of him. **Caesar had the courtroom, but Christ held eternity.**

Every empire that ever marched across the pages of history eventually discovered that its authority was temporary. Pharaoh had his armies, Nebuchadnezzar had Babylon, the Caesars had Rome, and generations of monarchs, conquerors, dictators, and presidents have exercised tremendous power over the lives of men. Some governed wisely, others wickedly, and many managed to accomplish both good and evil during their time in office. But every one of them eventually surrendered his authority to death, defeat, succession, or the passing of time. Daniel 2:21 declares that God "removeth kings, and setteth up kings." The Almighty has never needed permission from an emperor to change an empire. He does not consult an election commission before carrying out His purposes, and He has never surrendered control of history to a political party. The man who believes his earthly government will last forever has mistaken a temporary arrangement for an eternal kingdom. Human power has an expiration date. The authority of Jesus Christ does not.

The Christian must understand these truths without falling into either of two dangerous errors. One error despises legitimate civil government, refuses lawful responsibilities, and imagines that rebellion against earthly authority automatically demonstrates faithfulness to God. The other practically worships governmental power, excuses political wickedness, and attempts to transform the Church into an earthly political kingdom. Both positions contradict Scripture. Romans 13 establishes the divine institution of civil government, while Acts 5 establishes the supremacy of obedience to God. Matthew 22 recognizes

legitimate earthly obligations, while John 18 distinguishes Christ's kingdom from the political systems of this present world. Daniel establishes God's purposes concerning earthly kingdoms, and Revelation reveals their ultimate surrender to the returning King. These passages belong together. The Christian is commanded to live responsibly beneath earthly authority while remembering that his ultimate citizenship is in heaven. **Respect Caesar's office, fulfill Caesar's lawful demands, and never forget that Caesar himself must answer to Christ.**

1. God Established Government, but He Never Surrendered His Throne

Romans 13:1 declares, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” There stands the biblical foundation of civil authority, and no Christian has permission to tear that verse out of his Bible merely because he dislikes the government presently occupying office. God established government as a legitimate institution for the preservation of civil order, the restraint of wickedness, and the administration of justice. Romans 13:4 identifies the ruler as “the minister of God to thee for good,” explaining that he bears the sword as an instrument of lawful punishment. That sword is not a ceremonial decoration issued for public appearances. It represents genuine governmental authority over wrongdoing. A society in which every man appoints himself judge, jury, and executioner will not become a paradise of Christian liberty. It will become a place where the strongest sinner decides what everybody else is allowed to do.

The authority of government, however, is delegated rather than absolute. Daniel 4:17 declares that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson when his enormous pride was humbled by divine judgment. The man who boasted about the greatness of Babylon discovered that possessing an empire did not make him the possessor of heaven. Likewise, Jesus told Pilate in John 19:11, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” Pilate possessed legitimate governmental authority, yet his participation in the condemnation of the innocent Christ remained morally wrong. There is the distinction that neither the anarchist nor the political idolater wishes to acknowledge. God may permit a man to occupy authority without approving every action performed beneath that authority. **The throne may be established by divine permission while the man sitting upon it remains desperately wicked.**

First Peter 2:17 commands, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” Notice that the king receives honour, but God receives fear. The passage does not reverse those obligations. Civil government deserves lawful respect, but worship belongs exclusively to Almighty God. Christians should therefore respect legitimate offices, obey

lawful commands, maintain honest dealings, and refuse unnecessary rebellion. Yet no ruler possesses unlimited jurisdiction over the believer's conscience, worship, or obedience to Scripture. A president cannot forgive sins, a governor cannot grant eternal life, and a judge cannot overturn the commandments of God. Earthly authority operates within a jurisdiction established beneath divine authority. When officials fulfill their lawful responsibilities, they perform a necessary function in human society. When they demand wickedness, they violate the purpose of their office. The Christian must know the difference. **Respecting the authority God established does not require worshipping the sinner who happens to exercise it.**

2. Caesar Deserves His Due, but He Does Not Own Everything

Matthew 22:21 records the Lord's declaration, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.” The Pharisees had attempted to trap Christ with a question concerning tribute to Caesar. They wanted an answer that could be used against Him politically or religiously, but the Lord exposed their hypocrisy and established a distinction they could not overthrow. Caesar possessed legitimate claims within the earthly order, but those claims did not extend to everything belonging to God. Romans 13:6–7 reinforces the Christian's responsibility to pay legitimate tribute, custom, and honour. A believer cannot claim salvation by grace as an excuse to falsify financial records, cheat lawful taxation, or disregard ordinary civil obligations. The man who wants highways, police protection, public order, and every benefit of government while refusing every lawful responsibility has confused Christian liberty with personal convenience. Salvation does not turn dishonesty into a spiritual privilege.

The government's legitimate authority also includes the administration of justice. Romans 13:4 declares that the ruler bears the sword to execute wrath upon those who do evil. Yet Proverbs 17:15 warns, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” Those words expose the boundaries of righteous government. Lawful punishment is not inherently wicked, and protecting innocent citizens is a serious responsibility. But a police officer who abuses his authority, a judge who accepts bribes, or a prosecutor who knowingly manufactures evidence has corrupted the very institution entrusted to restrain wrongdoing. A badge cannot make brutality righteous, and a judicial robe cannot turn a lie into truth. Christians should support honest law enforcement without excusing proven misconduct. They should oppose corruption without automatically condemning every public servant. **God gave government a sword to restrain wickedness, not a license to practice wickedness with official approval.**

The same distinctions apply to military service and the legitimate defense of a nation. Luke 3:14 records John the Baptist instructing soldiers concerning wrongful violence, false accusations, and dishonest gain without commanding them to abandon their occupation. Matthew 8 records Christ commending the faith of a Roman centurion. Neither passage establishes that every military campaign is righteous, nor does either permit soldiers to commit atrocities beneath the excuse of following orders. Israel's divinely commanded wars under the Old Testament belonged to a particular covenant setting and do not authorize modern Gentile nations to conduct wars of conquest in God's name. Christians may honour those who serve, recognize legitimate defense, and appreciate the sacrifices of veterans without worshipping military power. The flag has its proper place, but it cannot occupy the throne of God. A soldier may serve his country honourably, yet no earthly commander possesses authority to command him to sin.

3. The Ballot Box Cannot Perform the Work of the Cross

Philippians 3:20 declares, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” That statement ought to settle the question of where the Christian's ultimate allegiance belongs. The believer may possess lawful earthly citizenship, participate in civil government, vote according to conscience, and seek the welfare of his country. But his eternal standing is found in Jesus Christ, not in a political organization. The New Testament does not establish a universal command requiring every Christian to participate in modern elections, nor does it prohibit responsible political participation. A believer may examine public policy according to biblical principles without treating a candidate as a saviour. Political decisions can affect earthly lives, but they cannot accomplish spiritual regeneration. A ballot may determine who occupies an earthly office, but it cannot determine whose name is written in heaven. **An election can change an administration; it cannot wash away one sin.**

The danger becomes greater when Christians begin identifying a political party with the kingdom of God. Some professing believers can recognize sin instantly when committed by political opponents while finding an endless supply of excuses for the identical conduct among their preferred officials. Apparently, the commandments against lying, stealing, and false witness are supposed to change whenever campaign signs change colours. But God has never issued a Republican Bible, a Democratic Bible, or a special edition containing exemptions for influential supporters. Proverbs 14:34 declares, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” That principle does not belong exclusively to one political movement. A Christian should evaluate conduct truthfully, refuse dishonest accusations, and remember that political loyalty never excuses wickedness. Neither major

party possesses divine authority to define righteousness. The Word of God must judge the believer's conduct, not the latest platform approved by political strategists.

Second Corinthians 5:20 identifies believers as ambassadors for Christ, while 2 Timothy 2:4 warns against becoming entangled with the affairs of this life to the neglect of one's appointed service. These passages do not forbid ordinary civic responsibilities, but they establish the superiority of the Christian's spiritual commission. The Church was sent to preach the gospel, teach sound doctrine, make disciples, and bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. It was not commissioned to establish the Millennium through political conquest. A Christian may serve honourably in public office, as Daniel served faithfully under Gentile rulers, without turning the local church into a campaign headquarters. The preacher must remain free to condemn sin regardless of political affiliation and proclaim salvation to sinners regardless of their earthly convictions. **When the pulpit becomes an extension of a political party, the preacher has traded an eternal commission for a temporary campaign assignment.**

4. The Sword Has Limits, and the Conscience Must Answer to God

Acts 5:29 declares, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Those words do not contradict Romans 13. They establish the boundary beyond which human authority cannot legitimately command obedience. The apostles were ordered to stop preaching Jesus Christ, directly contradicting the commission they had received from their risen Lord. They refused because obedience to the earthly authorities would have required disobedience to God. The Hebrew midwives faced a similar conflict when Pharaoh commanded the murder of innocent male children. Exodus 1:17 declares that they feared God and refused to carry out the king's instructions. Their conduct did not establish a universal exemption from civil government. It demonstrated that governmental authority cannot sanctify murder. A command to commit wickedness remains wicked regardless of the title possessed by the man issuing it. **Caesar may sign the order, but his signature cannot transform sin into righteousness.**

Daniel 3 records Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, even when threatened with death in a fiery furnace. Their declaration included the magnificent words, “But if not,” demonstrating that obedience to God did not depend upon guaranteed earthly deliverance. Daniel 6 records another royal decree designed to make faithful prayer unlawful. Daniel continued praying “as he did aforetime,” refusing to abandon his devotion merely because the government had attached a penalty to it. These were Jewish servants living under Gentile authority in particular historical settings, and their circumstances must not be confused with the Church's present heavenly calling. Nevertheless, the moral principle remains unmistakable. No

earthly ruler may require idolatry, murder, or direct disobedience to God. The believer who faces such a command must obey the higher authority, even when obedience carries a severe earthly price.

Yet biblical resistance must never become an excuse for lawlessness. The apostles did not organize an armed revolution when authorities forbade their preaching. Paul used his Roman citizenship to challenge unlawful treatment in Acts 16, and he exercised his right of appeal unto Caesar in Acts 25. Those examples demonstrate that Christians may employ legitimate legal remedies without surrendering their testimony. They may also refuse commands directly contrary to Scripture while remaining truthful, peaceable, and restrained in their conduct. Romans 12:21 commands, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” A Christian who manufactures accusations, threatens officials, or participates in wickedness while claiming to defend righteousness has defeated his own testimony. The proper boundary of disobedience must come from Scripture, not personal anger or political preferences. **The Christian is not required to become Caesar's accomplice, but neither has he been commissioned to become a criminal merely because Caesar displeases him.**

5. Israel's Promised Kingdom Is Not America's Political Future

God made specific promises to Abraham concerning his seed and the land, established His covenant with Israel, and promised David an enduring royal dynasty. Genesis 12, Genesis 15, and 2 Samuel 7 belong to a developing revelation concerning God's purposes for His chosen nation. Those promises were not made to the United States, transferred to a modern political party, or surrendered to the Church as though Israel had disappeared from God's prophetic plan. Romans 11:25 explains that blindness in part has happened to Israel “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,” and verse 29 declares, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” The Church must not steal Israel's national promises and then construct an earthly political theology upon that theft. **You cannot turn America into Israel by putting a flag beside the pulpit, quoting a verse from Deuteronomy, and announcing that your preferred candidate has inherited David's throne.**

The Church is a distinct body formed through the saving work of Jesus Christ, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles united in Him. First Corinthians 12:13 declares, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.” Ephesians 2 explains the spiritual unity accomplished through Christ without requiring the destruction of God's national promises to Israel. Believers in the present dispensation are saved by grace through faith, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and blessed with a heavenly position in Christ. Their commission is the proclamation of the gospel, not the conquest of earthly

governments to establish Israel's promised kingdom. That distinction does not prohibit Christians from serving their communities or advocating for righteous laws. It prohibits confusing earthly political accomplishments with God's prophetic fulfillment. Civil reform may restrain certain forms of wickedness, but it cannot regenerate a sinner or transform a Gentile nation into covenant Israel.

The prophetic order must also be preserved. First Thessalonians 4:16–17 reveals the Lord descending from heaven to receive His people, with the dead in Christ rising first and living believers caught up together with them. First Corinthians 15:51–52 describes the corresponding mystery of the believer's transformation. This blessed hope of the Church must be distinguished from the visible Second Advent, when Christ returns in judgment and establishes His earthly reign. Zechariah 14, Revelation 19, and Revelation 20 concern events associated with that future kingdom and its establishment. The Rapture is not a political revolution, and the Second Advent is not an election. Christ's future literal Millennial reign follows His glorious return, not a gradual campaign by the Church to seize earthly power. **The Millennium will not arrive because Christians finally elect enough politicians. It will arrive because the King Himself returns to establish His throne.**

6. The Stone Will Strike the Image, and the Kingdom Will Stand Forever

Daniel 2:44 declares, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.” The surrounding prophecy concerns Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image representing successive earthly kingdoms. The image possessed impressive dimensions and remarkable materials, but it had one serious problem: it was temporary. Daniel described a stone “cut out without hands” striking the image upon its feet, breaking the image, and eventually becoming a great mountain that filled the whole earth. The prophecy does not describe a committee of religious activists gradually improving human government until the world becomes the kingdom of Christ. It describes divine intervention overthrowing the kingdoms represented by the image. The earthly systems of men will not evolve into the everlasting kingdom through superior political management. God Himself will establish the kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

Revelation 11:15 announces, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” That declaration belongs to the prophetic judgments described in Revelation and anticipates the final triumph of the Lord's authority over earthly kingdoms. It must not be confused with the present political influence of churches or the accomplishments of earthly governments during the Church Age. The verse announces a divine certainty, not a political strategy. Human rulers may campaign, legislate, negotiate, conquer, and surrender, but they cannot establish the

everlasting kingdom promised in Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ will accomplish that according to the prophetic purposes of God. The kingdoms of this world may presently appear mighty, yet their authority is borrowed and their duration limited. **Every empire has a beginning, every earthly throne has an ending, and every ruler who mistakes temporary power for eternal sovereignty has misunderstood both history and prophecy.**

Revelation 19:11–16 reveals the returning Christ with unmistakable authority. John declares, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” Verse 15 describes His rule with a rod of iron, and verse 16 identifies His title: “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” The passage concerns the visible, triumphant return of Jesus Christ in judgment, not His first coming in humility or the Church's present proclamation of the gospel. Revelation 20 then identifies the thousand-year reign associated with His kingdom. Here is the literal earthly government that will accomplish what fallen human rulers have never achieved: perfectly righteous rule under the appointed King. No bribed judge will influence His decisions, no dishonest politician will purchase His favour, and no corrupt administration will overturn His commandments. **Caesar governed with soldiers, laws, and earthly power. Christ will reign with divine authority that neither requires human permission nor admits human correction.**

7. Until the King Returns, Christians Still Have Work to Do

The certainty of Christ's future reign does not permit Christians to abandon present responsibilities. Romans 13 continues to require lawful submission, honest taxation, proper respect, and recognition of governmental authority. First Timothy 2:1–4 continues to command prayer for rulers and expresses God's desire that men be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth. Christians should desire just laws, honest courts, public peace, and protection for innocent people. They may serve in legitimate government offices, exercise lawful citizenship, expose proven corruption, and use appropriate legal remedies when authorities exceed their jurisdiction. Yet their conduct must remain governed by Scripture. A Christian should not become dishonest while condemning dishonest officials or become violent while claiming to defend peace. His responsibilities before God remain unchanged regardless of which earthly political movement occupies power. **The certainty that Christ will one day rule perfectly is no excuse for a Christian to behave wickedly while waiting for Him.**

Believers must also maintain a faithful testimony when governmental authorities become hostile to biblical convictions. Acts records apostles imprisoned and beaten because they continued preaching Jesus Christ. Second Timothy 3:12 warns that those living godly in

Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Yet First Peter 4 distinguishes suffering for righteousness from suffering because of one's own wrongdoing. The Christian must never manufacture persecution from ordinary inconvenience or deliberate lawlessness. Nor may he surrender clear biblical commandments merely to avoid trouble. He should pursue peace, exercise discernment, seek lawful protection, and remain prepared to endure genuine suffering when obedience to God becomes costly. The Church should pray for persecuted brethren, assist their families, maintain sound preaching, and refuse the temptation to retaliate through wickedness. Government may create difficult conditions for Christian service, but it cannot revoke the believer's eternal standing in Jesus Christ. Earthly circumstances may change; the gospel remains the same.

Above all, the Christian must keep the salvation of sinners before him. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from human works. That message is needed by presidents, prisoners, police officers, judges, soldiers, business owners, and ordinary citizens alike. No earthly position provides righteousness before God, and no political affiliation can remove the guilt of sin. A government may improve public order, but it cannot give eternal life. A nation may experience economic prosperity while remaining spiritually lost. The Christian's calling is therefore greater than political success. He is an ambassador for Christ, entrusted with the message of reconciliation. **A nation may have the finest constitution ever written by men and still contain millions of sinners who need the blood of Jesus Christ.**

Conclusion

The question of the Christian's relationship to government is settled neither by blind obedience nor by rebellious independence. Scripture commands respect for legitimate authority while establishing the supremacy of Almighty God over every earthly institution. Civil government was ordained to restrain evil, administer justice, and preserve order, but no ruler possesses divine approval for wickedness merely because he holds office. Christians must pay legitimate obligations, conduct themselves honestly, respect lawful authority, and pray for those who govern. They must also refuse corruption, defend the innocent, speak the truth, and obey God when human authorities directly command sin. Political participation may be legitimate, but political idolatry is not. Patriotism may be honourable, but the nation must never become an object of worship. Military service may be lawful, but no earthly commander may require wickedness. Government has real authority, real responsibilities, and real limitations. **God gave Caesar a sword for civil order, not a throne from which to command heaven.**

The greatest danger is that Christians may become so consumed with earthly government that they neglect the eternal commission entrusted to the Church. They may defend political movements more passionately than they defend sound doctrine, excuse public wickedness while condemning private sin, and spend more time arguing over elections than proclaiming the gospel. Others may withdraw entirely from legitimate civil responsibility, abandoning opportunities to exercise honesty, justice, and faithful service. Neither extreme honours Scripture. The Christian belongs to Jesus Christ, and his conduct should demonstrate that allegiance in every sphere of life. His eternal salvation rests upon the finished work of the Saviour, not upon his political choices, personal achievements, or participation in earthly government. His heavenly citizenship does not eliminate earthly duties; it places them beneath the authority of God. Let the Church preach Christ, let the believer walk in righteousness, and let every earthly ruler remember that his authority remains temporary.

One day the final earthly boast will be silenced, the last proud ruler will surrender his borrowed authority, and the kingdoms of this world will yield to the One whose right it is to reign. Pharaoh's armies could not overthrow Him, Nebuchadnezzar's empire could not contain Him, Pilate's judgment could not condemn Him permanently, and Rome's soldiers could not keep Him in the tomb. The Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will return according to the Scriptures. Revelation 19:16 declares His eternal title: “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” Until that day, the Christian must remain faithful, honouring lawful government without surrendering to governmental wickedness and proclaiming the gospel without confusing earthly political accomplishments with the coming kingdom. **Caesar may occupy a throne, but he does not own eternity. He may command armies, but he cannot command Almighty God. He may write laws, but he cannot rewrite Scripture. He may condemn a faithful witness, but he cannot overturn the promises of Jesus Christ. Every earthly crown will eventually fall, every borrowed authority will be surrendered, and every ruler will answer to the King who never needed an election to establish His right to reign. Caesar has his throne for a season, but Christ has the final word forever.**

Conclusion — The Christian and Government

Submission, Resistance, and Higher Authority

When the last political speech has been delivered, the last campaign sign has been taken down, the last courtroom has been emptied, and the last earthly ruler has surrendered his

office, one truth will remain standing exactly where it stood before the first human government ever existed: Almighty God is still on His throne. Men have fought wars over governments, murdered kings to obtain governments, betrayed their neighbors to preserve governments, and sold their principles for a comfortable position inside governments. Empires have risen with tremendous power and collapsed into historical ruins. Presidents have promised prosperity, monarchs have demanded allegiance, dictators have claimed absolute authority, and politicians have discovered that a polished speech can sometimes conceal a thoroughly rotten heart. Yet not one of them has ever managed to move the throne of heaven one inch. Daniel 2:21 declares that God "removeth kings, and setteth up kings." That is not a suggestion for earthly rulers to consider. It is a declaration of divine sovereignty. Caesar may rule for a season, but the season belongs to God. The Christian who understands that truth can respect legitimate authority without worshipping it, oppose genuine wickedness without becoming a rebel, and face political uncertainty without acting as though Jesus Christ has lost control of His kingdom.

Throughout this series, we have established something that must never be forgotten: civil government is an institution ordained by Almighty God, not an invention of the devil merely because wicked men sometimes occupy its offices. Romans 13:1 declares, "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Those words were written under Roman authority, not under a government operated by Bible-believing Christians. The Lord established civil authority because fallen men require restraint, justice must be administered, and innocent people must be protected from those who would otherwise exploit and destroy them. Government possesses a legitimate sword, and Romans 13:4 makes clear that the sword is not borne in vain. But that same Bible condemns rulers who pervert judgment, accept bribes, shed innocent blood, and use public authority for wicked purposes. God ordained the office, not every sin committed by the officeholder. He established government to restrain wrongdoing, not to provide wrongdoing with a taxpayer-funded headquarters. A crooked judge does not make justice wicked, and an abusive officer does not eliminate the necessity of lawful authority. The proper response to corruption is righteousness, not the destruction of every institution through which justice ought to operate. **The authority of government is legitimate because God established it, but the actions of government must still be judged by the God who gave it authority.**

We have also established that Christian liberty does not provide a free pass from ordinary civil responsibility. The Lord Jesus Christ declared in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." A believer should not need to be threatened with imprisonment before he decides to tell the truth about his finances, fulfill legitimate obligations, or respect lawful regulations. Romans 13:7 commands Christians to render tribute, custom, fear, and honour where they

are due. Those instructions do not disappear because the government spends money foolishly, an elected official holds objectionable views, or the tax collector arrives at an inconvenient moment. Christians may oppose excessive taxation, challenge unlawful decisions, petition for reform, and demand accountability through legitimate means. But the man who falsifies financial records while preaching about governmental dishonesty has become a rather poor advertisement for biblical integrity. There is nothing spiritual about cheating Caesar because you dislike the way Caesar manages his treasury. Neither, however, does paying legitimate taxes require a Christian to approve every governmental expenditure or surrender his conscience to the state. Caesar has his proper sphere of authority, and God has His. The trouble begins when Caesar demands what does not belong to him or when the Christian refuses what he lawfully owes. **Christian liberty is not permission to become dishonest, and civil obedience is not permission for government to become God.**

The matters of law enforcement, judicial authority, and military service have revealed the same governing principle. God authorizes civil government to restrain evil, but He does not authorize officials to commit evil while restraining it. Proverbs 17:15 declares, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” A police officer who protects innocent citizens performs a legitimate public responsibility. A judge who administers impartial justice fulfills an honourable duty. A soldier who lawfully defends his country may serve with genuine courage and integrity. Yet a badge cannot sanctify brutality, a judicial robe cannot disguise a dishonest verdict, and a military uniform cannot excuse an atrocity. John the Baptist instructed soldiers against wrongful violence, false accusations, and dishonest gain without commanding them to abandon their profession. Jesus Christ commended the faith of a Roman centurion without declaring every Roman military campaign righteous. Christians should therefore honour faithful public servants without excusing proven misconduct and respect military sacrifices without worshipping military power. **The sword was given for the restraint of wickedness, not for the satisfaction of the temper of the man holding it.** An earthly officer may possess real authority over others, but he remains a sinner accountable to the Lord who permitted him to exercise it.

Political participation has also been placed in its proper biblical setting. A Christian may vote, hold public office, seek the welfare of his country, and advocate for laws consistent with righteousness without confusing those responsibilities with the commission given to the Church. But when political identity becomes more important than biblical identity, the Christian has wandered into dangerous territory. Some professing believers will condemn corruption in an opposing political movement while finding an astonishing number of excuses for the same behavior among their preferred officials. They defend politicians

whose conduct they would never tolerate from a pastor, excuse lies they would condemn in their children, and treat political disagreement as though it were evidence that another person has rejected the gospel. That is not sound doctrine. That is party loyalty dressed up for Sunday morning. Philippians 3:20 declares, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Neither major political party possesses the authority to define Christianity, and no campaign platform has been added to the canon of Scripture. A believer may exercise responsible earthly citizenship without turning the ballot box into a substitute for the Judgment Seat of Christ. **Political parties can influence the direction of a nation, but they cannot determine the eternal destiny of a soul. A politician may win an election and remain lost, while a sinner may lose everything earthly and still possess eternal life through Jesus Christ.**

The matter of Christian nationalism deserves particular attention because it exposes a serious confusion concerning Israel, the Church, and the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ. God made specific covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David concerning Israel's national future, inheritance, and promised King. Those promises have not been transferred to the United States or to any other modern Gentile nation merely because its citizens possess a history of religious influence. The Church is the body of Christ, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles united through the saving work of the Lord Jesus. Its commission is to preach the gospel, teach sound doctrine, make disciples, and bear witness to the truth, not to manufacture the promised Millennial Kingdom by capturing earthly political institutions. John 18:36 records Christ's declaration, “My kingdom is not of this world.” That statement does not cancel His future literal earthly reign; it distinguishes the source and character of His kingdom from the worldly political machinery standing before Pilate. The Rapture of the Church must remain distinct from Christ's future visible Second Advent, and Israel's national promises must not be stolen to decorate a modern political movement. **You cannot vote the Millennium into existence, legislate the new birth into a sinner's heart, or establish the kingdom of God by electing enough men who know how to quote the Bible. The King will establish His kingdom when He returns, not when a political party finally achieves a majority.**

We have confronted governmental corruption because Scripture gives Christians no permission to close their eyes to wickedness simply because the sinner committing it holds public office. Proverbs 29:2 declares, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Isaiah condemned rulers who accepted dishonest rewards, oppressed the vulnerable, and wrote unrighteous decrees. Micah 6:8 established the requirement to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Ephesians 5:11 commands believers to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Those passages establish the responsibility to

recognize and confront genuine wrongdoing, not to manufacture accusations against people we dislike. A Christian should refuse participation in bribery, fraud, false testimony, and the dishonest misuse of governmental authority. He may expose documented corruption, defend innocent people, seek lawful correction, and refuse to protect wickedness merely because the guilty person belongs to a favoured organization. But he must never become a liar while attempting to expose another liar. **If your crusade against corruption requires dishonesty, you have not defeated corruption; you have simply joined its membership.** God does not maintain separate moral standards for political friends and political enemies. Wickedness remains wickedness no matter whose name appears on the campaign sign.

The Christian's responsibility to pray for rulers must also remain firmly established. First Timothy 2:1–2 commands supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for all men, specifically including kings and all who occupy governmental authority. The instruction was not restricted to righteous rulers or administrations friendly toward Christianity. A believer may oppose a president's policies, challenge a governor's decisions, or seek the lawful removal of a corrupt official while still praying for his salvation, wisdom, and just conduct. Indeed, the more seriously a ruler has departed from righteousness, the more appropriate it becomes to pray that God will restrain his wickedness and bring him to repentance. The Lord is not confused by the political controversies that confuse men. Proverbs 21:1 declares, “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” That truth should produce confidence in God's providence rather than bitterness toward every earthly authority. The Christian does not need to defend a ruler's wrongdoing to pray for his soul. **It is a terrible testimony when a believer spends an entire day arguing about a politician he has never once brought before the throne of grace. The man occupying the highest earthly office still needs the same Saviour as the prisoner occupying the lowest cell.**

Yet there comes a point at which obedience to human authority must give way to the higher authority of Almighty God. Acts 5:29 declares, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” The apostles spoke those words when commanded to stop preaching Jesus Christ. The Hebrew midwives refused Pharaoh's murderous instructions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. Daniel continued praying when a royal decree attempted to prohibit his devotion to the LORD. These examples demonstrate that government cannot lawfully require the believer to commit wickedness or abandon a clear divine obligation. But they do not authorize every Christian to transform his personal grievances into acts of spiritual heroism. A disputed fee is not automatically persecution, an unpopular regulation is not automatically tyranny, and an ordinary legal penalty is not automatically equivalent to being thrown into the lions' den. The Christian

must establish his position from Scripture rather than political anger. He may use legitimate legal remedies, challenge unlawful commands, and seek correction without threatening officials or participating in violence. **The believer is not commissioned to be a revolutionary searching for an excuse to fight Caesar, but he is commanded to remain faithful when Caesar demands what belongs to God.** Biblical submission has limits, and biblical resistance has boundaries. Both are established by the same Lord.

We have also examined the reality of governmental persecution, and the book of Acts leaves no room for pretending faithful Christianity will always be welcomed by earthly authorities. Peter and John were imprisoned, the apostles were beaten, James was killed, Peter was placed under guard, and Paul and Silas suffered imprisonment at Philippi. Yet the gospel continued. Some were miraculously delivered, while others suffered death. Their differing circumstances did not indicate that God loved one servant more than another. Second Timothy 3:12 declares, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Nevertheless, First Peter 4 distinguishes suffering for righteousness from suffering because of personal wrongdoing. Christians should not seek unnecessary conflict or manufacture persecution through lawless conduct. Neither should they surrender biblical truth merely to preserve employment, reputation, possessions, or personal comfort. Churches must pray for persecuted brethren, assist their families, continue faithful preaching, and refuse to allow fear to replace obedience. Paul declared in 2 Timothy 2:9 that although he suffered bonds, “the word of God is not bound.” That statement remains a tremendous encouragement. **Caesar may imprison the messenger, but he cannot imprison the message. He may confiscate the Bible, but he cannot erase what God has spoken. He may silence a witness for a season, but he cannot silence the testimony of the empty tomb.**

The final hope of the Christian is not an earthly government that finally becomes perfect through human effort. It is the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of everything God has promised in His Word. Daniel 2:44 declares that the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. Revelation 11:15 announces, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 19 reveals the returning Christ, whose vesture bears the title “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” This is no political candidate seeking permission to govern, no earthly monarch struggling to preserve his dynasty, and no temporary administrator whose authority depends upon the approval of sinful men. This is the Lord Jesus Christ returning in power and glory to accomplish the prophetic purposes of Almighty God. His future literal reign will not be established through human military conquest or political negotiation. It will be established by the King Himself. The Church's present calling must not be confused with that future kingdom, and the believer's heavenly

hope must never be reduced to the success of an earthly nation. **Every human government has an expiration date, every earthly crown will eventually be surrendered, and every empire will discover that the King of kings was never competing for His throne.**

So where does all of this leave the Christian living under civil government today? It leaves him with responsibilities that are neither complicated nor optional. Obey legitimate laws. Pay what is lawfully owed. Honour rightful authority. Pray for those who govern. Support righteous judgment. Refuse dishonesty and corruption. Exercise lawful citizenship responsibly. Defend the innocent and speak the truth. Never confuse patriotism with worship or a political party with the body of Christ. When government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, obey the higher authority and remain faithful regardless of the cost. Most importantly, preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, because no government on earth possesses the power to save a sinner. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not by works. A president cannot forgive sins, a judge cannot declare a man righteous before God, and an entire legislature cannot vote one soul into heaven. The believer's eternal standing rests upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, not upon the success or failure of earthly government.

The final word belongs to Jesus Christ, and every Christian ought to live as though he actually believes that truth. Pharaoh had his armies, but the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar had his golden image, but three faithful Hebrew men refused to bow. Darius had his decree, but Daniel continued praying. Herod had his sword, but he could not destroy the gospel. Pilate had his judgment seat, but he could not keep the Son of God in the tomb. Rome had its soldiers, its governors, its prisons, and its empire, but the Word of God continued spreading long after its rulers had surrendered their crowns. And one day, every earthly government will answer to the King whose kingdom shall never be destroyed. Until then, let the Christian live honourably beneath lawful authority without becoming the servant of wickedness. Let him refuse political idolatry without despising legitimate government. Let him stand against genuine persecution without manufacturing rebellion. Let him proclaim the Scriptures without apology and hold fast to the gospel that no earthly power can overthrow. **Caesar may have his throne, but Christ has the final word. Caesar may command his armies, but Christ commands eternity. Caesar may write his laws, but Christ has spoken words that shall never pass away. Caesar may imprison the faithful, but he cannot imprison the truth. Every earthly throne is temporary, every human ruler is accountable, and every kingdom of men will eventually surrender to the King who reigns forever. Respect the government God**

ordained, refuse the wickedness God condemned, and never surrender the allegiance that belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ. For Caesar's authority ends at the boundaries of his earthly kingdom, but the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ shall never end.

