

## Emperors, Governors and Protests

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.*

*Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

1 Peter 2:13-17

This text is extremely appropriate for our Covid-19 pandemic and the protest movements now covering our country. What does God have to say about subjection to authority and protests?

Let's look verse-by-verse at verses 13-14.

**First: "Be subject"** means to be submissive to authority and this implies obedience to that authority.

Romans 13:1-5 - *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

- a) There is no authority except from God
- b) God has instituted the authorities that exist
- c) To resist authorities is to rest God
- d) Resisting authority incurs judgement
- e) Authorities are God's servant

This is why Peter says, "Be subject" to authorities.

### **Second: For the Lord's Sake**

This is the theological basis for our submission. It honors God since

- a) God has created authority structures
- b) God exists in an authority structure
  - Ontological nature of the Trinity – all equal

- Economic nature of the Trinity –
  - Son submits to the Father
  - Spirit submits to the Son

If we are going to protest, it must be done in such a way as honors God.

**Third: To Every Human Institution = every institution ordained for men**

It's a common extra-biblical word created to refer to the governmental body or founding a city.

- a) Government – 2:13b-14
- b) Masters – 2:18
- c) Husbands – 3:1

The word includes parents/children, employers/employees, teachers/students, etc.

Authority doesn't exist just because of sin

- d) Angels

1 Thess 4:16a - *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel...*

Jude 9 - *But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses*

- e) Redeemed in heaven

Luke 19:17-19 - *And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.'* <sup>18</sup> *And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.'* <sup>19</sup> *And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'*

- f) Trinity

1 Cor 11:3 - *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

1 Cor 15:28 - *When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

**Fourth: Whether it be to the emperor as supreme**

When Peter wrote this epistle, the emperor was Nero (reigned AD 54-68) who persecuted Christians and crucified Peter.

This means that our obedience is not dependent on the morality of the emperor but on God's morality who established the emperor

#### **Fifth: Or to governors as sent by him**

This title is used of Pilate (Mt 27:2) and Felix (Acts 23:34).

Governors are representatives of the Emperor

They are sent by God through the emperor:

- a) to punish those who do evil

*Punishment = ekdikesis = taking vengeance, making a wrongdoer pay a penalty*

Romans 12:9 - *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it<sup>[1]</sup> to the wrath of God,*

Hebrews 10:30 - *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."*

Some theories of criminal punishment teach that protecting society and reforming criminals are the only legitimate purposes of punishment. But in this verse,

- Peter includes retribution, the inflicting of just penalty as a legitimate punishment.
- Peter expects governments to do this and not individuals; (vs 19-23; Ro 12:19-21; Mt 5:38-48).
- Governments that fail to punish wrongdoers disobey God.

- b) to praise those who do good.

To promote governmental virtue and prevent abuse, Christians should pray and work for governments that accomplish God's will (1 Tim 2:1-4; Ps 82:1-4; 125:3).

#### **Sixth: When is it Correct to Protest Governments?**

BUT there are occasions when God's people have disobeyed a human government and received God's approval

- a) Murdering Male Hebrew Children

Exodus 1:15-21 - *Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup> "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." <sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. <sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" <sup>19</sup> The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." <sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.*

Exodus 20:13 – *Do not murder* = the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment.

When the government commands or encourages us to do something that is contrary to God's clearly stated law, we have the right to disobey government.

#### b) Worshipping Idols

Daniel 3:13-18 - *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*

24-25 - *Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." <sup>25</sup> He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."*

Again, Nebuchadnezzar's command violated the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments:

Exodus 20:3 – *You shall have no other gods before me*

Exodus 20:4 – *You shall not make for yourself a carved image*

#### c) Praying

Daniel 6:10-13 - *When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. <sup>11</sup> Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea*

before his God. <sup>12</sup> Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” <sup>13</sup> Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

1 Kings 8:46-50 - *If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, <sup>47</sup> yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’ <sup>48</sup> if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, <sup>49</sup> then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause <sup>50</sup> and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them <sup>5</sup>*

#### d) Preaching

Acts 4:18-20 - *So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*

Acts 5:27-32 - *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

Matthew 28:18-19a - *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

Acts 1:8 - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

*Obey except when commanded to sin*

- Wayne Grudem

### Seventh: Covid-19 Guidelines and the Church

What is the difference between Covid-19 guidelines that restrict Hb 10:25 and Acts 5:29?

- 1 – We still gather although it is on the Internet
- 2 – We are gathering physically even though it has stipulations
- 3 – Gov't is not forbidding the preaching of the gospel
- 4 – The guidelines are not prejudicial against churches
- 5 – The guidelines are temporary
- 6 – Gov't is fulfilling its divine mandate: to serve and protect the health of its citizens

### Eighth: How Christians Can Protest

- a) Prayer – to establish God's kingdom on earth

Matt 6:10 - *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

ILL – We have turned a war-time walkie talkie intended to call in reinforcements into a bell calling for tea

- b) Personal Example – Jesus's life was a protest

Luke 4:18-19 - *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Jesus's life was one of protest against:

- The exclusion of the impoverished
- The captives who deserved liberty
- Blindness
- Oppression

We cannot limit poverty and blindness to physical states –

Revelation 3:17-18 – *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*

*the greatest and most loving thing we can do for anyone is release them from the captivity of sin (Romans 6:22-23), heal them from the blindness of unbelief (Acts 27:16f); (2 Cor 4:4), and*

*set them at liberty from the oppression of Satan (2 Timothy 2:26). Efforts at social improvement that neglect this great goal will be looked back on by poor people in hell as a horrible form of ecclesiastical malpractice.*

- John Piper

**Note the difference between Luke 4:18-19 & Isaiah 61:1-2** – *...because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, **and the day of vengeance of our God;***

*3 - to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness,*

*V 8 - For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong;*

- It is possible to love justice and hate robbery.
- To love justice *is* to hate robbery.
- Robbery is wrong.

Is the sin for which Jesus died, being demonstrated in your (personal or public) protest?

If so, then it is inconsistent with God's redeeming love.

c) Piety – Protest against your own sin

d) Participation

*Matthew 5:14-15 - You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

### **Conclusion:**

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

Let's so live that authorities "praise us for doing good."

*"In Germany they came first for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade-unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up"*

- Martin Niemöller in *Christian Century*, March 21–28, 1984, p. 296.