

RESPECT

Government Authority

How should you treat officials with whom you disagree? What are your obligations, as a Christian, to the government under which you live?

by Herman L. Hoeh

WHAT is your duty toward the government under which you live?

Should you resist Supreme Court ajunctions?

What about "peaceful demonstrations" and "sit-ins"?

Do you owe respect to officials with whom you may disagree? Should you pay taxes to political office-holders even when they abuse their high offices? Are officials responsible "to the people," or to God?

Which?

What Does Scripture Say?

This generation has grown up in an atmosphere of utter disrespect toward authority. You see it everywhere — both in the home and in public life.

It's high time to realize there is a JUDGMENT coming. It does make a difference how *you* act toward those in authority.

Your Bible explains the relationship of Christians to human governments. But how many of you know what it says?

Notice Romans 13:1-7:

"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. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: AND THEY THAT RESIST SHALL RECEIVE TO THEMSELVES DAMNATION!"

This is not just Paul speaking. It is Jesus' directive to Christians for all time, for every generation.

Notice it! "They that resist" —

those who refuse to submit to authority — "shall receive to themselves damnation."

That's not just the penalty for assassination or for murdering a policeman who is protecting the peace. That's the penalty for *any* who *resist* constituted authority. That's the awful judgment God renders on those who incite civil strife, or who create incidents by so-called "peaceful demonstrations" or "sit-ins" or bombings of churches and schools.

Continuing:

"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. 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. *Wherefore ye must needs be subject*, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 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."

Instead of preaching this truth from the Bible, most ministers preach their own words about "getting out the vote," or "supporting a Christian candidate." "It is your duty," they say.

This is not what Jesus or the apostles taught. The *real* Christian duty is NOT

to mix with political affairs of this world, but to be subject to authorities — to show *respect* for those in public office. You are to be *separate from* the world, although living decently and respectfully in it (John 17:15, 16). The time to *change* this world is at the coming of Christ. And it will take Christ to do it.

Does Government Authority Come from the People?

Government authority and power are ORDAINED OF GOD. They are not derived "from the consent of the governed" — the people. Your Bible says so!

"There is NO authority but of God." "The authorities that exist are ordained of God."

Human beings seem to reason that because men may be elected or appointed or may seize power, that their only authority proceeds from the people that supported them. And the people like to have it so because it puts the people *in the place of God!*

This is an age when men don't want to acknowledge the God who rules in earthly affairs. The clergy is failing to preach the truth. Almost everyone is as ignorant of this power as was Pontius Pilate. Jesus had to tell Pilate that the authority vested in him came from the Almighty.

Notice that Pilate reasoned just like people today: "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speaketh thou not unto me? knowest thou not that *I have power* to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, EXCEPT

IT WERE GIVEN THEE FROM ABOVE" (John 19:10-11).

Since all authority is ordained of, or allowed by, God, we are to be *subject* to human governments. In respecting that authority, we are showing respect to God. ANYONE WHO RESISTS THE AUTHORITY OF HUMAN GOVERNMENTS IS ACTUALLY REBELLING AGAINST GOD WHO ORDAINS THAT AUTHORITY. This applies not only to *civil* authorities, but equally as well to any person in a position of authority, whether a school teacher or a foreman in a factory.

Thinking Up an Excuse

It is only human nature for people to think of an excuse to rebel against God. It doesn't matter how evil men in office may be. It is *God* who will judge them!

God ordained rulers to punish evil works and protect the obedient. Even though officials may be elected or appointed by the people, *they are accountable only to God who permits them to exercise authority*. Persons in responsible positions may fail to properly fulfill the responsibilities of their offices — to punish wrong deeds and preserve order. They may even in some cases corrupt the government. But as long as God permits them to be in authority and to remain in office, you are commanded to REMAIN in subjection to the divinely ordained authority which they hold.

You pay respect to God when you respect men who hold office by God's permission and authority. Since it is God who sets men in office, it is *His* responsibility to remove them. One who does violence to public office — or one who approves such an act — is trying to steal God's authority as Supreme Ruler.

It is so hard for human beings to conceive this principle because nearly everyone has been deceived from childhood into believing God has nothing whatsoever to do with the civil governments of this world. Perhaps you were never told that *the right to exercise authority over human beings is solely the prerogative of the divine Creator*. Human beings do not inherently have the right or the ability to rule properly

over fellow human beings. But God is a God of order, not confusion. Since men won't submit to His own government and laws, He has given permission *in this age*, before the return of Jesus Christ, that men may exercise authority in all phases of life.

Example of Saul and David

Human beings in authority sometimes serve themselves and the devil, but the OFFICE is *ordained of God!* You honor the person *because of the OFFICE* which he holds, even when his deeds may be evil.

Consider the case of Saul and David. King Saul obtained his position from God, as do all rulers. Saul was disobedient to the Eternal and David knew it. Did David therefore rebel and seek to organize the people to remove him from office?

No, he did not — not even after God had chosen and anointed him to replace Saul as king. Instead, David said this: "The Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish. The Eternal forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Eternal's anointed" (I Sam. 26:9-11).

Notice that David recognized the fact that it is *God's right* to put persons out of office. It could not be the people's right since the people have never been given the right in God's sight to put such men *into* office in the first place. David respected and honored and submitted to the office which Saul exercised. He left it in *God's* hands to remove him from office *at the appointed time!* Christians must do the same.

Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this truth, and it took him seven grueling years. He finally admitted after regaining his sanity that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the BASEST OF MEN" (Daniel 4:17; 2:21).

Even if God decides to place in office the least capable and the basest men — because of the sins of the people — who are we to condemn the wise judgment of God? *And strange as it may be, sometimes the people, in their attempt to make themselves wiser than*

God, elect the least capable man, which is ACCORDING TO THE PLANNED FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE ETERNAL GOD.

God never approves corruption or abuses by office-holders. But it is God, not you, who will judge them. Your obligation is to respect *the authority of the OFFICE*.

Is Submission Always Obedience?

There are certain powerful churches, particularly in Europe, but also in America, which teach that human government is not only of divine origin, but that respect for authority and submission to officialdom means TOTAL OBEDIENCE TO LEADERS and even dictators.

This teaching is absolutely *false!*

Jesus' words in Matthew 23:2-4 are quoted to support this terrible error. In speaking to the multitude and the disciples, Jesus said: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: *all* therefore *whatsoever* they bid you observe, that observe and do..." It is at this point that these denominations stop quoting the words of Jesus to give the impression that you must obey everything that a person in authority commands.

But what did Jesus continue to say? "But do NOT ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

There it is. Those Jewish religious leaders taught part of the truth, but they themselves were not obeying the truth. Therefore Jesus had to instruct the people that the *religious authority* of the scribes and Pharisees must be respected. They were to observe whatever truth was preached, but they were *not to follow the error*.

In Acts 4:19 you are given the true Bible definition of "submission." The disciples had just been commanded to *disobey* God. What did they say to the authorities? That *obedience* to God is more important than obedience to men. Notice, however, that the apostles did not resist them. They *submitted* to the *penalty* imposed by their accusers (Acts 5:40).

Thus you have the true relationship that should exist between every Christian and the human government under

which he lives. You are to honor and respect authority and *submit to every ordinance of man*. ONLY when obedience to human rules and regulations would violate the laws of God should you steadfastly decline to obey. But even then *you must respectfully submit to the penalty*. So said the apostle Peter.

What Peter Commanded

The apostle Peter recognized the importance of Christians' relationships to human government. He had the courage to preach the truth. Here is what he said: "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. FOR SO IS THE WILL OF GOD . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king*" (I Peter 2:13-17).

Take careful note of his wording. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance." Peter did *not* say, "*Obey every ordinance.*" Of course not. He knew that many human regulations are wrong. God expects all Christians to obey human regulations whenever and wherever possible, and always submit to the penalty in case obedience to human law would be sin. We should never rebel or use violence even if we know human governments are making wrong decisions.

Christians are to be examples of submission to government regulations, no matter how childish or absurd some stipulations may be. "Be subject to principalities and powers . . . to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man" (Titus 3:1, 2).

Is It Wrong Even to Speak Evil of Officials?

It is a common practice for people to resist government regulations and to accuse office-holders, whether the President or the corner policeman. This supposed "right" of the people is abominably misused. There is a righteous limit to the "freedom" of speech.

The Bible sets that limit by commanding you to refrain from speaking

evil of dignitaries. Solomon said you are not to curse officials even in your thoughts (Eccl. 10:20).

It is reproachful to Christ as well as a dishonor to His authority for Christians to hurl or to repeat *needless accusations* against rulers. This, of course, does not mean that you can't say anything about a man's mistakes. Rather it means that no gossip or misrepresentation of facts which damage a person's character or prestige is to be repeated.

Christians should not fight the government in its own courts as certain deceived religious sects sometimes do. Rather submit, and patiently pray for God to change the circumstances according to His will.

Most Christians ought to pray more earnestly that their minds and hearts would be free from slanderous thoughts, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE PERSON SEEMS TO DESERVE THEM. The righteous Michael the archangel even refused to accuse Satan. He calmly said, "The Lord rebuke thee." Only the *ungodly* dig up evil to throw needlessly at their enemies (Prov. 16:27).

There is also another important point which has often been overlooked. In Romans 13:4, you read that Christians are to "be afraid" of government power, if they have committed evil. Yet Jesus taught us *not* to fear man, but rather fear God (Luke 12:5). How can you reconcile these verses?

By the fact that Christians are *not* actually to be afraid of the *men* in office, but rather "*of the power*" which they wield by God's permission. You fear their authority because they are the servants or revengers of God to curb crime. In reality, then, you are only fearing the power of God who gave this authority to rulers.

When you do good, you "may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will NOT fear what *man* shall do unto me'" (Hebrews 13:6).

Is the Payment of Taxes Necessary?

Now comes an often-misunderstood part of this vital message. Should you pay taxes if you are a Christian? If so, why?

Paul said that Christians MUST PAY TAXES, CUSTOM DUTIES AND TRIBUTE to those in authority. Why? "For they are God's ministers," His servants, "attending continually upon this very thing." It is their job, their work to regulate society and to punish crime. Government costs money. Officials are worthy of their hire.

Because of covetousness, especially when income tax or land tax bills appear, some seize upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 17:24-27 as an excuse for failure to pay taxes. Notice what Jesus really said: Christians, being free and heirs of the Kingdom of God, should not be required to pay tribute to a *foreign* government, "notwithstanding, lest we should offend them . . . give unto them" the tax.

Yes, Christ commands you, just as Paul did, to pay taxes. And you should not pay them grudgingly, either. It is the right of leaders to receive remuneration for their duty. But what if officials are not performing their duty properly or are squandering tax money for private ambition? Are you still to pay taxes?

Certainly. You are not the one to judge whether he is worthy of his hire. As long as any person is in office, you are to honor that office by submitting to it. It is so easy to forget that human beings are not the judges of one another — that God is the Judge. Officials are not responsible to the people but to God. Your responsibility ceases once you have honestly paid the tax or the duty. It is the official's responsibility to see that he properly administers the money.

Although this is the day of exorbitantly high government costs and subsequent high taxation, you should never fear that God may fail to provide the amount necessary to conform to state, federal or local laws. Jesus provided Peter with the extra tribute money beyond the normal increase (Matt. 17:24-27).

Prayer for Officials

In the days of the Roman Empire, when Jesus was training his disciples, it was the custom of the government to *compel people to carry mail* and

goods belonging to the Empire. Jesus referred to this forced practice when he said, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (Matthew 5:41). Notice that Jesus taught submission, not resistance.

Today the government does not compel its citizens to bear this responsibility.

How thankful are you for this fact? It is so easy to forget the benefits of an ordered society — the postal service, and the various agencies of protec-

tion, to name a few. So easy to neglect Paul's admonition that 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 life in godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour (I Timothy 2:1-3).

God has established earthly governments *to keep order* until His Kingdom comes. It is your commanded duty to submit to their authority patiently,

excusing the obvious faults inherent in human leadership. No *human* government can be perfect. It may even be required of you by God to suffer unjustly when you have to obey God rather than man. But you must submit to that penalty. All human history is a record of the tragedy of human governments which God is about to replace by sending Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God and bring us peace and security.

Let's pray for that day!