

It Is Our Duty To Obey Our Rulers

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It Is Our Duty to Obey Our Rulers, Who Are God's Ministers and Punish Evil Doers Only
(Romans 13:1-3, 6).

It Is Not Our Duty to Obey Rulers, Who Sometimes Punish the Good and Receive Unto
Themselves Damnation (Ex. 1:17, 20; Dan. 3:16-18; 6:7-10; Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 23:11,
24, 33, 35; Ac. 4:26-27).

The two apparent contradictions being addressed in this study are unrelated. The first scriptural reference in Romans 13:1-3, 6, is dealing with Paul's admonition to be subject to civil law and authority. Otherwise, any community or society will descend into chaos and anarchy,

Let every soul (living person) be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority (in the ultimate sense) except from God (cf. Prov. 8:15-16), and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same (Rom. 13:1-3; Ed. notes in parentheses; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

For because of this you also pay taxes (proof that Paul was referring to civil law; cf. Mt. 22:17-21), for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing (Rom. 13:6; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The balance of the scriptures in this study are dealing with breaching God's law and receiving judgment,

But the midwives (of ancient Israel) feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but (instead) saved the male children alive (Ed. notes in parentheses; Ex. 1:17).

The crux of this last scripture was whether the midwives were going to break God's law by murdering the male Israelite babies, or obey a civil ordinance issued by the king of Egypt. The early church had to deal with a similar situation, although murder was not involved and the ordinance came from the Jewish religious authorities,

And when they (captain of the temple and his officers) had brought them (some of Christ's apostles), they set them before the council (Jewish priests). And the high priest asked them,²⁸ saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name (i.e. the name of Jesus Christ)? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood on us' (cf. Mt. 27:25)!²⁹ Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men (Ac. 5:27-29; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Christ gave his disciples a clear command, and it involved preaching about the kingdom of God that will come to this earth, and they chose to obey his directive rather than the command from the Jewish religious leaders,

And he (Christ) said to them (his disciples), 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel (good news) to every creature (Mk. 16:15; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The next apparent contradiction in scripture is similar to Exodus 1:17 and Acts 5:27-29, except it is dealing with the worship of an image, which is contrary to God's first and second commandments (Ex. 20:3-5),

Sharach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case (cf. Dan. 3:15), our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up' (Dan. 3:16-18; cf. 6:1-23; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The next apparent contradiction is dealing with a totally separate subject. All the scriptures that follow describe the judgment of those rulers who have misused their position and authority,

Then he (Christ) said to them (his disciples) in his teaching, 'Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense (for appearance sake) make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation (Mk. 12:38-40; cf. Lk. 23:11, 24, 33, 35; Ac. 4:26-27; Ed. notes in parentheses).

In another parable, Jesus Christ emphasized that rulers are to serve others and their level of service is measured to a higher standard. As Satan and those who followed him are referred to as rulers (Eph. 6:12), and because they know about God's standards (Jas. 2:19), they are without excuse for the many abuses they have perpetrated (Isa. 14:12, 16-17). Therefore, the principles espoused in this parable apply more to Satan and the demons than to physical rulers,

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes (Lk. 12:47).

... For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more (Lk. 12:48b).

In the physical realm, if a ruler is abusive toward someone that is following all the rules of man and God, that ruler will be judged accordingly,

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy ... (Jas. 2:13a; cf. Lk. 6:38).

When a person, who is trying to obey God and man, encounters abuse at the hands of an unrighteous ruler, it is essential to bear in mind that Almighty God is aware and will provide a way out, even though it might involve the death of that innocent person. This has been the case with many of God's servants, including Jesus Christ, throughout

man's history. Christ addressed this situation when he exposed the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders,

Serpents, brood (offspring) of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell (Gr. gehenna; a garbage dump outside Jerusalem where the bodies of criminals were burned)?³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,³⁵ that on you may come all the righteous bloodshed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Mt. 23:33-35; Ed. note in parentheses).

In conclusion, mankind is to obey civil laws and if any of these laws are untenable the politicians who approved them can be voted out of office, in most countries. If a ruler is abusive toward law-abiding citizens, that ruler will be judged without mercy by God, either in this life or the next. Those who wish to obey the law and commandments of God have a responsibility to fulfill what God expects them to do, even if it involves various forms of punishment from civil, or religious authorities. Therefore, there are no contradictions in the scriptures dealing with these distinctly different subjects.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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