

The Kingdom & The Powers Part 3: Submitting & Obeying Authorities

Discussion Guide – May 11, 2025

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13:1-7

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 1 Pet. 2:13-14

Quotes:

"[Paul] does not speak about individual rulers but about the principle of authority itself. For that there should be rulers and ruled and that things should not just lapse into anarchy, with the people swaying like waves from one extreme to the other, is the work of God's wisdom." John Chrysostom

"We are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God. But if the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God." John Stott

Discussion Questions

1. Paul says twice in Romans 13 that we're to *submit* (ὑποτασσόμενοι) to governing authorities—but elsewhere the New Testament tells us to *obey* (ὑπακούειν) God even when authorities forbid it. How does that distinction change the way you think about your relationship with the state? Can you think of a situation in your own life where you've felt called to submit (place yourself under) but not necessarily obey (do what you're told)?
2. John Stott's rule of thumb was: "Submit up to the point where obedience to the state entails disobedience to God; beyond that, resist." What real-world issue today feels like that "tipping point" for you—where following the law might mean betraying a clear Kingdom command? How might nonviolent protest look in that context?
3. We saw how Romans 13 was pressed into service by Constantine to legitimize Caesaropapism, by slave-holding preachers to endorse the Fugitive Slave Act, and even by Nazi pastors. Why do you think this text in particular has been so attractive to oppressive regimes? What does that teach us about reading and applying Scripture responsibly?
4. Jesus and Paul both submitted to being "handed over" yet disobeyed unjust mandates. In your own faith journey, how have you held that tension—honouring authority while remaining faithful to Jesus? What practical steps or rhythms (prayer, civic engagement, community discernment) help you navigate it today?