

What does the Bible say about our relationship to civil government?

General commands to obey the government:

Romans 13:1-7 – *“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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*

- God is the one who establishes governments to restrain evil and do good
- Obedience is obedience to God and rebellion is rebellion against God

Proverbs 21:1 – *“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”*

1 Peter 2:13-21 – *“¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. ¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”*

Matthew 22:15-22 – *“¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” ²¹ They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” ²² When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.”*

Is there ever a situation where we can resist or disobey the government?

You can and should disobey the government when the government is asking you to disobeying God (sin)

When civil authorities ask you not to preach the Gospel

- Matthew 28:18-20 – *“¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
- Acts 4:18, 5:17-42 – *“¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus...the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison....And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ 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.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men...⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”*

When civil authorities ask you to go against God’s commands

- Eating food that was unclean
 - Daniel 1:3-8 – *“³ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel...and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank...⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah of the tribe of Judah...⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.”*
- Bowing to the golden statue
 - Daniel 3:1-18 - *“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold...⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace” ... ¹⁴ 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?...¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”*
- Not praying to God
 - Daniel 6:6-10 - *“⁶ Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever!...the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions...¹⁰ 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.”*

When civil authorities ask you to participate in murder

- Hebrew Midwives
 - Exodus 1:15-21 - *“¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives...¹⁶ “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.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” ¹⁹ 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.” ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives...²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.”*
- Rahab hiding the Spies
 - Joshua 2:1-6 - *“And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. ² And it was told to the king of Jericho...³ Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” ⁶ But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.”*
- Wisemen and Herod
 - Matthew 2:1-12 - *“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled...⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way...¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”*
- Breaking the Law to save life
 - Esther 4:8-11 – *“⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people...¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹ “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live...I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”*

Different forms of resistance:

- Resisting when being asked to renounce the faith
- Resisting when you're being asked to do something that is unjust
- Resisting to protect life or to love neighbor

Difference between having a King and a Democracy

- For most of world history, you simply have a king and what he says goes. In America, we have a democracy where your vote counts towards how the government operates.
- America allows you to non-violently protest (1st amendment)
- The Supreme Court can decide a law is unconstitutional
- In America, you can resist when a “lower government” is acting unconstitutional

Is there ever a situation where we can revolt against the government?

Different types of revolution:

- Small scale: Fighting an officer of the state (Fighting a policeman)
- Large scale: Trying to overthrow a government (American Revolution, French Revolution, etc.)

The Bible doesn't say

- Notice with the previous two categories, the Bible is pretty clear:
 - Obey the government generally
 - Disobey the government when it asks you to disobey God
 - With revolution, the Bible is silent

Church History

- Augustine - "Unjust law is no law at all."
 - Only the government is justly allowed to use force, not individual citizens
 - Citizens can "resist" only by martyrdom, to changed laws and brings political reform
 - Rebellion may be allowed when rulers force the citizens to commit unjust or impious acts
- Thomas Aquinas - "Natural law" has endowed man with inherent rights
 - A law is unjust and should be disobeyed when it is not rooted in natural law
 - Still, Aquinas argued that citizens should simply disobey unjust laws, not rise in rebellion.
 - In extreme cases it is allowed for a subordinate ruler to overthrow a tyrant, but not the people at large.
- Martin Luther - sympathized with many of the peasants' grievances, but when they rebelled, he told the princes they should put down the rebellion.
- John Calvin - Lower magistrates should fight against the high magistrates if they are acting tyrannical and committing a crime against his citizens under their care.
 - But individuals were not to rebel and overthrow the government because God is the one who removes the kingdoms of the world.
- John Knox - It is a sin NOT to revolt against a tyrant

Interpreting Romans 13:

The question is: Does Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 mean we can never revolt or sometimes revolt?

- The burden of proof is on the one making the case for revolt
- If you revolt and are wrong, you are now in sin and are rebelling against God Himself

Interpretation #1: The idea that Romans 13 is saying to submit regardless

Interpretation #2: Romans 13 is giving a general command and therefore there may be certain situations where rebellion may be appropriate

- Historically people within this interpretation have said rebellion is appropriate when:
 - Government is not protecting human liberty
 - When a government is actually tyrannical
 - When rebellion allows you to keep more of God's laws