

Obedience to the Government

Titus 3:1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient . . .

Romans 13:1 – 7 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

1 Peter 2:13 – 17 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Acts 4:19 – 20 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. . . ."

How do we reconcile these passages:

1. Peter was opposing a religious authority, not a civil one. Peter's example shows us that it is proper to oppose religious authorities that demand that the truth be suppressed.
2. The dilemma of the apostles in Acts 4 and 5 was due to Jesus' clear command to obey their Jewish leaders (Matthew 23:2 – 3). The church came together and prayed fervently for direction (Acts 4:23 – 30) concerning the order from the Sanhedrin to stop speaking by the authority of Jesus (Acts 4:18). They received a miraculous response (Acts 4:31).
3. In the New Testament, there is no record of Christians opposing the civil government despite severe persecution and injustice, including imprisonment, torture, and execution.
4. Why have so many defied governments in the name of Jesus?
 - a. Failure to look for a better answer
 - b. Overconfidence in one's own discernment of the will of God
 - c. Reading American freedoms into the gospel