

“How Should We be Subject to the Authorities?”

Greeting:

Thank you for inviting me again to share a message of the Bible with you.

Now, another wave of corona epidemic is somewhat subsiding. I think we feel we are having a safer new year. But the war against Ukraine by Russia is still ongoing in the freezing cold country. In Russia if they write “No war!” on the paper and show it in the public, they will be arrested. As Christians, if they know that the war is unjust how would God want them to act? If the rulers in the world do something unjust, how should we react as Christians? Now let’s see the Bible together.

Prayer:

Dear Father, we are together before You to worship and to hear Your Word. Please talk to us, and teach us. So that we can act according to Your will, here on earth. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let me read **Romans 13:1-5 in the NIV**

1 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.

1. The governing authorities are established by God 13:1-2

Romans 13:1 (NIV)

1 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.

What are the governing authorities? The national government, of course, the local governments, the police and the agencies. We should obey and respect the laws and decrees issued by them. In our workplaces, we are supposed to follow the boss and superior persons. We should be subject to the rules set up by them. No ruler in the world is perfect. The one who has the power rules over other people much or less as one desires. Deceptions and manipulations often take place. But the Bible says, **“there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”** Still even the bad government is better than anarchy.

If Christians say, “We obey God. So we do not have to obey the secular authorities so much.” We are straying off from what the Bible teaches.

Romans 13:2 (NIV)

2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

The Book of Romans was written around AD 56. The Roman emperor then was Nero. He reigned from AD 54 to AD 68. He was a notorious tyrant and he even killed his mother, and he commanded his wife to commit suicide. And many of the Roman Senate members were executed. What he really loved was that he forcibly had people gather in the colosseum and held recitals to let them hear his singing, reciting poems he composed and even his playing the harp. Out of his imprudence, he wasted much of the empire's treasures. In AD 64, a big fire broke out in Rome and the majority of the city was burned down. There spread a rumor that Nero set the fire. So Nero put the blame on Christians. He started to persecute them. There are documents that Apostles Peter and Paul were martyred on this occasion. In such a situation, Bible asserts to be subject to the governing authorities.

Then, how does God deal with the rulers or persons in authorities?

Example 1. Manasseh(B.C.697-642), King of Judah.

The worst king listed in the genealogy to Jesus in Matthew chapter 1.

What he did.

2Kings chapter 21 in the ESV

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

A long reign!

3 For he rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.

Manasseh rebuilt idol worshipping places that his pious father Hezekiah destroyed and added many other places for this purpose, which is a grave sin before God!

6 And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

16 Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

He killed so many innocent people!

How did God cope with Mannaseh?

2Chronicles 33:10-13 (ESV)

10 The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention.

11 Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon.

12 And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself

greatly before the God of his fathers.

13 He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

After this, repented Mannaseh took away all the idol worshipping places. And worshipped the Lord as the only God.

God must have foreknown that Mannaseh had a heart to repent and He led him to repentance.

Example 2. Sennacherib (BC705-681), King of Assyria

In the time of King Hezekiah of Judah, he attacked Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent his commander and had him shout to Jerusalem.

Isaiah 36:18-20 (ESV)

18 Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The LORD will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?

20 Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?”

How did God react to Sennacherib?

Isaiah 37:36-38 (ESV)

36 And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

37 Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh.

38 And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword. And after they escaped into the land of Ararat, Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

To the arrogant Sennacherib, God smashed his army in silence. The 185,000 soldiers might have been killed by pest epidemic because an ancient historian Herodotus recorded that the army was infested by rats. Sennacherib was killed by his sons, he had an infamous end to his life.

Example 3. Cyrus (BC550-530), King of Persia

Just as prophesied by Jeremiah, Judah could return to Israel after 70 years of Captivity in Babylon, because Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire and delivered the people of Judah.

2Chronicles 36:22 (ESV)

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

But this was already prophesied by Isaiah about 150 years before it took place.

Isaiah chapter 45 (ESV)

1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed:

God says,

2 “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,

4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.

God, called Cyrus by name, to make him accomplish God’s plan. Isaiah prophesied this around BC 700, about 150 years before Cyrus actually fulfilled this prophesy. God uses even the foreign kings to do what He wills.

2. Rulers are God’s servants. 13:3-5

Romans 13:3-5 (NIV)

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.

God affirms the rulers of this world to maintain the social orders. And the Bible calls them “God’s servants”, twice! The word translated to “servant” is “diakonos” in Greek. This word is used for a church deacon.

5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

Not only to avoid punishments, but because of our conscience, we ought to obey the rulers. If so, there are occasions that contradict our conscience to obey the rulers even though they hold terror.

The Bible teaches us the cases where we are exempted to obey the authorities.

The cases we should not obey the rulers.

Case 1. When obeying rulers contradicts obeying God.

Acts 4:18-20 (ESV)

18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,

20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

The leaders and elders of Jerusalem commanded Peter and John, not to talk about Jesus. But they responded “We must speak what we have seen and heard about Jesus.”

Acts 5:29 (ESV)

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

When God’s command and men’s order disagrees, we should obey God.

Case 2. When rulers do wrong.

37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.”

38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.

39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

A. How much and how sincerely should we obey our authorities and rulers?

Ephesians 6:5-7 (ESV)

5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

“Bondservants” means “slaves.” In those days, small-scale industry was carried out by using some slaves. They were treated as persons. So the bondservants here are somewhat similar to current employees. This verse instructs to obey your earthly masters sincerely as you would obey Christ.

6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

1Peter 2:18-19 (ESV)

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

Even if the master is unjust, Christian servants are instructed to obey with all respect.

19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

If the servants endure sorrows of being treated unjustly, the Bible says, it is a gracious thing. In other words, it is a grace of God.

B. The specific thing Christians can do for rulers and authorities.

1Timothy 2:1-2 (ESV)

1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is a passage that Paul urges us to pray for the authorities of this world. He starts by saying, “First of all.” So this prayer is not like, “This is also important, so if you have time, you ought to pray this.” But, “First of all, I urge you to pray this prayer,” because this is a prayer of priority.”

Then Paul says, ”**Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions.**”

O.K. I pray, “Bless the Prime Minister of Japan, and also the Ministers. Bless the Parliament members. Lord, bless the Governor of Osaka Prefecture, and also the Mayor of Osaka City. OK, now I prayed.” These verses do not mention such an instantaneous prayer. Instead, it says, “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions.” So, if a certain politician has a problem, we should not be just disappointed and condemn that person. Instead, God wants us to intercede for that person. And if the problem is solved, we ought to give thanks to God for it. Why should we pray for them? Because they are God’s servants.

C. Why is it that God wants us, Christians to pray for the rulers and authorities this much?

1Peter 2:9 (ESV)

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This verse says that Christians are chosen people by God to be saved, and to live with Him eternally. Then, Christians are “a royal priesthood.” In other words, Christians are kingly priests. “Christians are kings” this means, Christians may not have big earthly power, but they are kings.

Because God made us humans in the very close image of God, and to have dominion over all the earth. But we humans turned away from God. Then we, humans, had no access to God. But because Christ died for us, Christians have direct fellowship with God and now extends God’s dominion over the earth. We, Christians have direct access to God and have the power to bring down heavenly blessings to the earth. This is “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We can exercise this heavenly power or dominion. Christians are a royal priesthood. Priests are to pray for the people, intercede for the sinned, so that the heavenly blessings and grace come upon them. Christians are entrusted to exercise the power and grace of God on earth through prayer.

The earthly leaders are God’s servants. They need our prayers to do God’s will. God assigned us the power to apply heavenly blessings on earth for them through prayer.

Let me share a testimony of Soichiro NAKAJIMA.

When he was a junior-high student, his father went bankrupt in his business. The family of seven had to live in a three-mat room. The family did not have money to buy even school textbooks. Nakajima-san delivered newspapers. In his high school days, he did not have time or a place to study. In his college days, he did not have place to stay. He could live with the family he tutored. During the school vacations he did whatever possible jobs were available.

In the meantime, he bought a Bible and read it. He started to attend a church and accepted Jesus Christ and gave his life to God.

After he got employment, he held his religious life as important along with his job. God blessed him and he was entrusted to manage the company-wide affairs and to proceed with management reforms.

He writes. When I was appointed to be the new director of the board, the president pressed me to answer, “Which will you take, the church or our company?” When I took an action to take the church, all my jobs were taken away and I was downgraded to a trifling job. I endured for several months and prayed for the president so that he might not be punished by God. I earnestly waited for God to solve this situation. Eight months later, the president found a company newsletter of 20 years before in his desk, and read my testimony and Bible passage of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, the chapter of love. It became clear that I had been working based on my faith since my younger days. By this I was restored to the former job, with even

heavier responsibility to be in charge of the local and overseas affiliated companies. God made a miracle to happen for me.

After Nakajima-san retired, he studied in a Bible institute and continued his evangelistic activities.

By Nakajima-san's sincere prayer for the president, the president and the company could receive the blessing of having Nakajima-san work for the company and God's blessings through his prayers.

I pray daily, for the Prime Minister of Japan, four of his Cabinet members, four of the ruling and opposition party leaders at a time, plus some other leaders and for the issues and problems I come to know through the news media. I feel that God listens to even my prayers and answers on occasions.

Prayer:

Dear Father, You have saved us by believing Jesus Christ as our Savior. Now you have made us Your Royal Priesthood to administer Your blessings here on earth. Let us faithfully obey the rulers and authorities as we obey Jesus. Let us also pray for and intercede for all the people and for the people in high positions in authority and in our workplaces so that they may receive your abundant blessings and do righteousness in their fields of responsibility. Your glory be manifested even through our prayers. In Jesus' Name. Amen