

# THE BEREAN

"... examining the scriptures daily..." (Acts 17:11).

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## Submission To Civil Rulers

BY B. G. ECHOLS

**This is a subject that needs to be taught in every age; no less so in ours when disrespect for authority is widespread. The instruction is: "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on**

evil-doers and for praise to them that do well. For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. "Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Peter begins this section by stressing a principle of the gospel - subordination. We are to be a submissive people (1 Pet. 2:13, 18; 3:1; 5:5). This is an act of our will as we render ourselves subordinate. We are to submit to whatever form of government exists. The institution of government works for the good of society, and Christians should be loyal and peaceable citizens.

A higher law always takes precedence over a lower one. A signal light can be over-ruled by an officer or an emergency ve-

hicle. The only legitimate reason to disobey the law of man is a higher authority, God (Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29). If we must disobey a human law because it conflicts with God's law, we must also be prepared to accept the consequences without complaint.

Christians have two controlling incentives: "For the Lord's sake" (2:13), and "It is God's will" (2:15). Obeying the laws of the land is part of our service to Christ. If it is for His sake, it does not extend to sinful commands of government. Christians obey, not because they have to, but because they choose to; not from human motives as fear of punishment, but because God has ordained government, and we obey Him. We must never allow slanders about us to be true (Acts 17:7). During persecutions carried out by the state it would be a strong temptation to rebel against all

state rules. Peter says we must not do so. Social disorder and war are hard times. They present obstacles to preaching. We should seek to keep the peace that we may labor for the Lord by teaching the word without fear or disruption. Nero was emperor and Christians were to obey him even though he was a wicked tyrant. We must respect the representatives of the government, even down to the school crossing guard.

One of God's purposes for civil government is for vengeance on evil-doers. It is to repress evil by proportionate punishment. The idea is of the execution of right and justice. It is not punishment by the whims of leaders, but of laws based on justice.

Government is also to encourage law-keeping by praising those who do well. This is not a human concept, but a divine one. Modern governments are exceeding what God expects. Rulers are to punish and praise.

Peter begins verse 15 with "For so" which is connected to "Be subject to every ordinance of man." Such obedience is intended to "put to silence" or to muzzle "the ignorance of foolish men." The ignorance is a self-willed ignorance resulting from an unwillingness to investigate. "Foolish" has the idea of "senseless" which is a strong word of condemna-

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tion. In their ignorance they make false charges against Christians. We are to muzzle their ignorance by our life-style. Wicked men are to be muzzled, but the muzzle to be used is the good deeds of the saints. We are to use no other means.

What does the apostle have in mind when he speaks of our being free (2:16)? Free from what? If we are subjects to God, must we not be free from human law and control? Christians do not take orders from any human, but only from Christ. We are not subjects to human authority. Being subjects to a higher authority frees us from the lower. Or, does Peter simply mean we have freedom of choice toward government just as we do toward God either to obey or disobey? Then he could be saying, You are free from sin so don't let it reach into your lives. Whatever it is, it does not elevate us above the law. True freedom implies submission to legitimate authority. We are not slaves to government, but willing subjects.

We cannot claim freedom in Christ as a covering for misdeeds. The clergy in the middle ages claimed exemption from the laws of kings. The way to bring true freedom from every form of oppression is to take the gospel to every creature. As servants of God we ought to be model citizens of the state. In being submissive to the state, we are not giving our loyalty to Caesar, but to God. In all faithfulness, we are His slaves.

Peter closes this section with four terse commands. "Honor all men." We must despise no one regardless! We are to see in all men the image of God. Respect is

due to all men in varying degrees, and is to be shown in some way, even to the humblest and the worst. Jesus died for all. Scorn and contempt for others is utterly out of place in the disciples of the lowly, humble Savior. Such an attitude is often a temptation for religious people. Remember the Pharisees! How do we honor all men? Surely we would never violate others or use them as objects. Be respectful, considerate, sympathetic, and seek to enlighten everyone with the gospel of Christ.

"Love the brotherhood." This term is an unusual one peculiar to Peter. We are to love all of God's people. Our love for our

brethren must be of the strongest form. "Fear God." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). It would be especially necessary to fear God if one were going to be able to honor a king like Nero. "Fear" means reverence. It is not terror. When we fear God with reverence and awe, we will obey Him and thus have no reason to fear judgment. "Honor the king." How? First, obey the laws of his dominion. Once respect is gone, subordination stops. Another way would be to pray for him (1 Tim. 2:1, 2).

### THEOPHILUS

