

Christians & Government



LIFE Fellowship
March 13, 2009

Christians & Government

Scriptural Principles

1. The governments/governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1)

- No distinction made between “good” or “bad” governments – all have been established by God



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Scriptural Principles

1. The governments/governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God

- Governments are intended for Man's good (Rom. 13:4) - part of God's 'Common Grace'
- the authorities are God's servants "to do you good"
 - restrain evil by being agents of God's wrath on wrongdoers (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:14) [in contrast to anarchy, when evil would run unchecked]
 - commend those who do good (Rom. 13:3; 1 Pet. 2:14)

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Scriptural Principles

1. The governments/governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God

- Primary function is to restrain evil & execute justice
 - they are authorized to use force, including lethal force (i.e. capital punishment), to punish those who do wrong

“But if you do wrong, be afraid, he does not bear the sword for nothing.” (Rom. 13:4)

“‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him [Peter], ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.’” (Matt. 26:52)

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Scriptural Principles

1. The governments/governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God

- In most instances, rebelling against/resisting the authorities is tantamount to rebelling against/resisting God

“Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.” (Rom. 13:2)



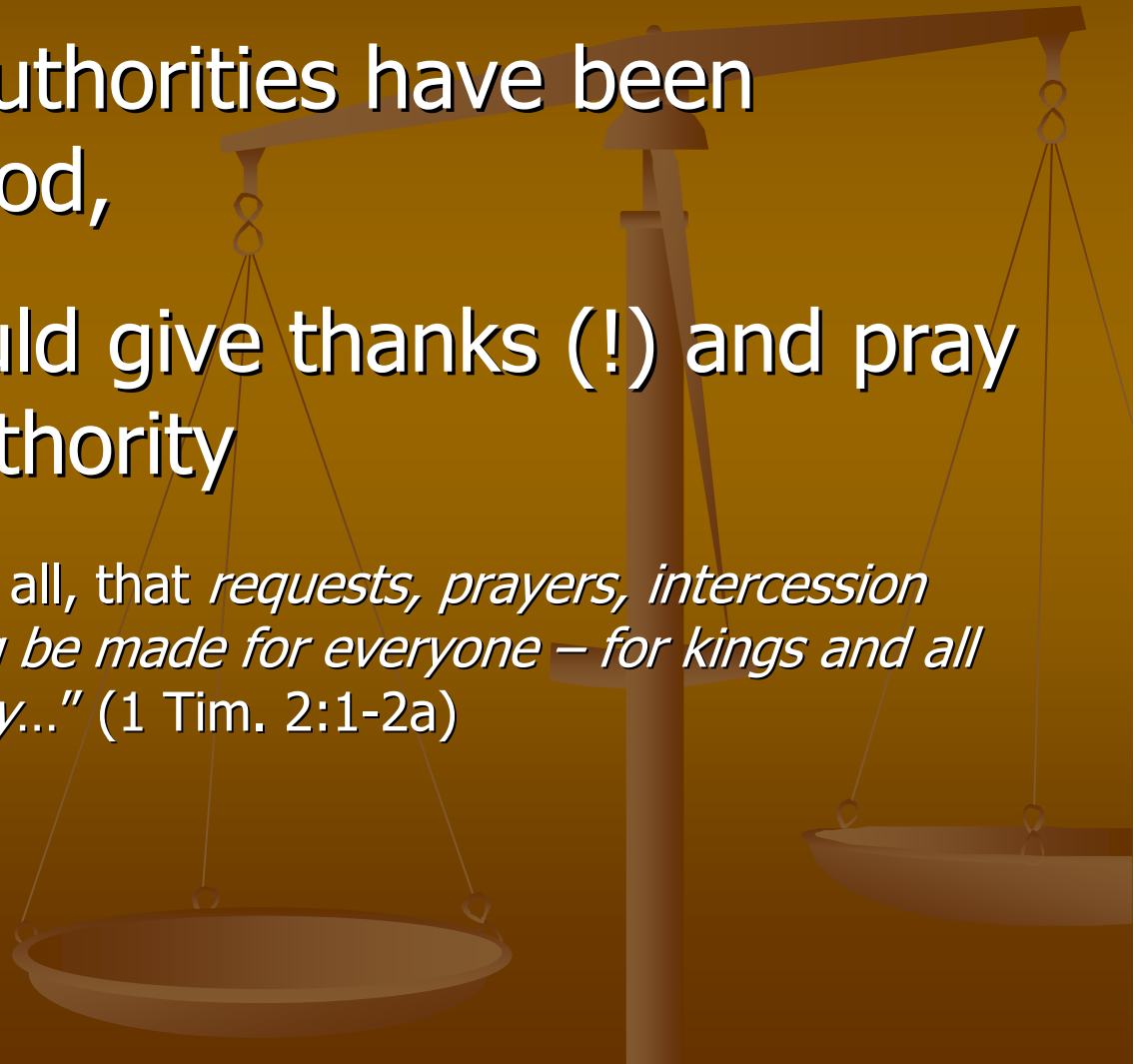
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Scriptural Principles

Since governing authorities have been instituted by God,

2. Christians should give thanks (!) and pray for those in authority

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority..." (1 Tim. 2:1-2a)



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Scriptural Principles

3. Christians have a duty before God to submit to the governing authorities

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."
(Romans 13:1)

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good..." (Titus 3:1)

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Scriptural Principles

3. Christians have a duty before God to submit to the governing authorities

“Submit yourselves *for the Lord’s sake* to every authority instituted among men...” (1 Peter 2:13)

- “For the Lord’s sake”
 - in obedience to His will (1 Pet. 2:15)
 - that we might not bring reproach to His Name (1 Pet. 2:15-16)
 - that others might see, and glorify Him (1 Pet. 2:12)

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Scriptural Principles

4. Submission to government means...

- Obeying to the governing authorities

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, *to be obedient*, to be ready to do whatever is good...” (Titus 3:1)

- some exceptions later...

- Not resisting or rebelling against the authorities

“Consequently, *he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves...* Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience.” (Rom. 13:2,5)

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Scriptural Principles

4. Submission to government means...

- Paying your taxes

"But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Matt. 8:18-21)

"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue..." (Rom. 13:7a)

- no exceptions/exemptions given - disagreeing with what the government is using your tax dollars for is not grounds for not paying taxes

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4. Submission to government means...

- Showing proper honor/respect to those in authority

"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; *if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*" (Rom. 13:7)

"Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, *honor the king.*" (1 Pet. 2:17)

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, *to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*" (Titus 3:1-2)

"...for it is written, '*Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.*'" (Paul, speaking of the High Priest, in Acts 23:5b)

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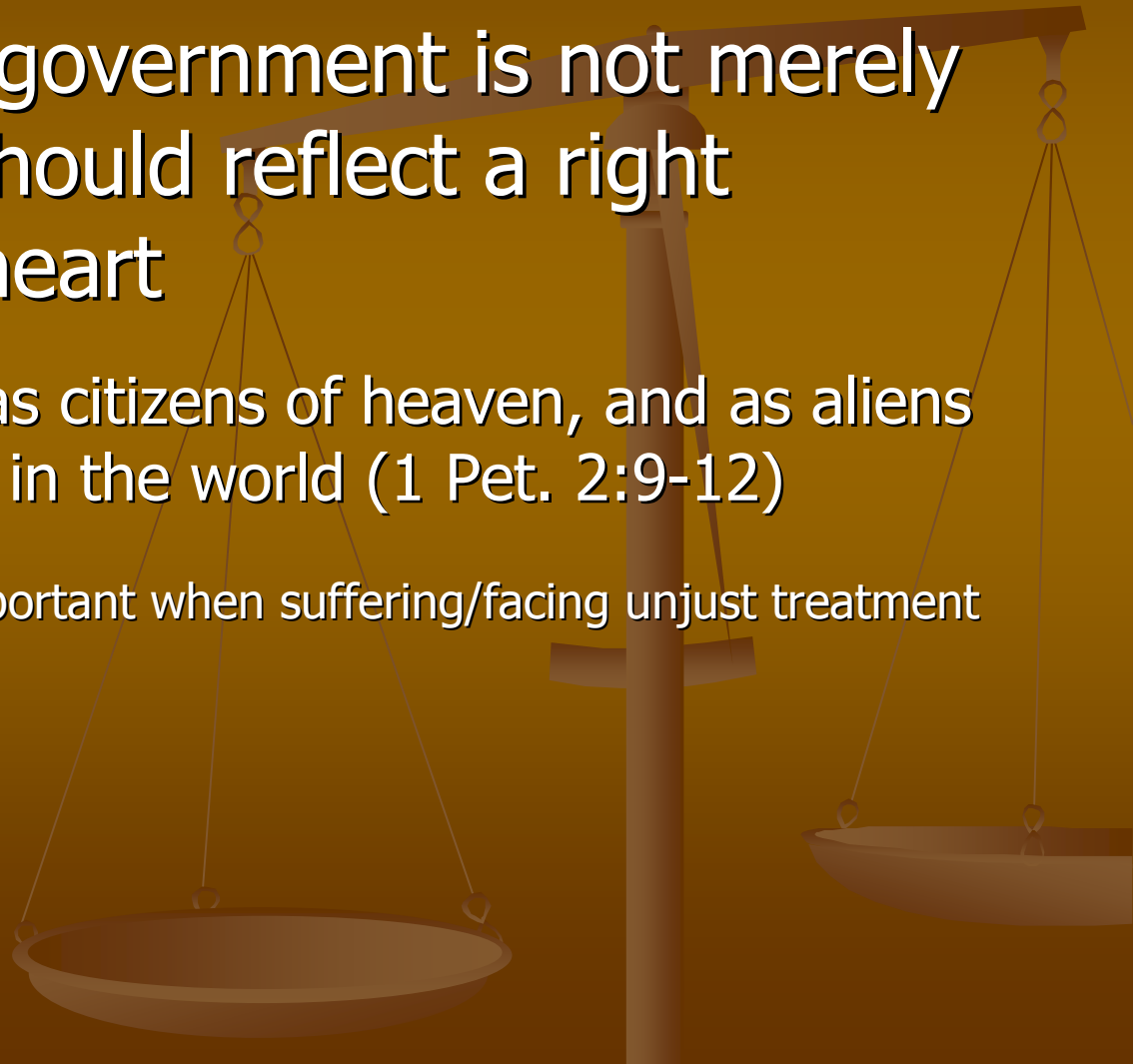
Scriptural Principles

5. Submission to government is not merely external, but should reflect a right attitude/right heart
- should flow from a heart that is submitted to God
“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.... Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good”
(Titus 2:11-12, 3:1)

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Scriptural Principles

5. Submission to government is not merely external, but should reflect a right attitude/right heart
- part of living as citizens of heaven, and as aliens and strangers in the world (1 Pet. 2:9-12)
 - particularly important when suffering/facing unjust treatment

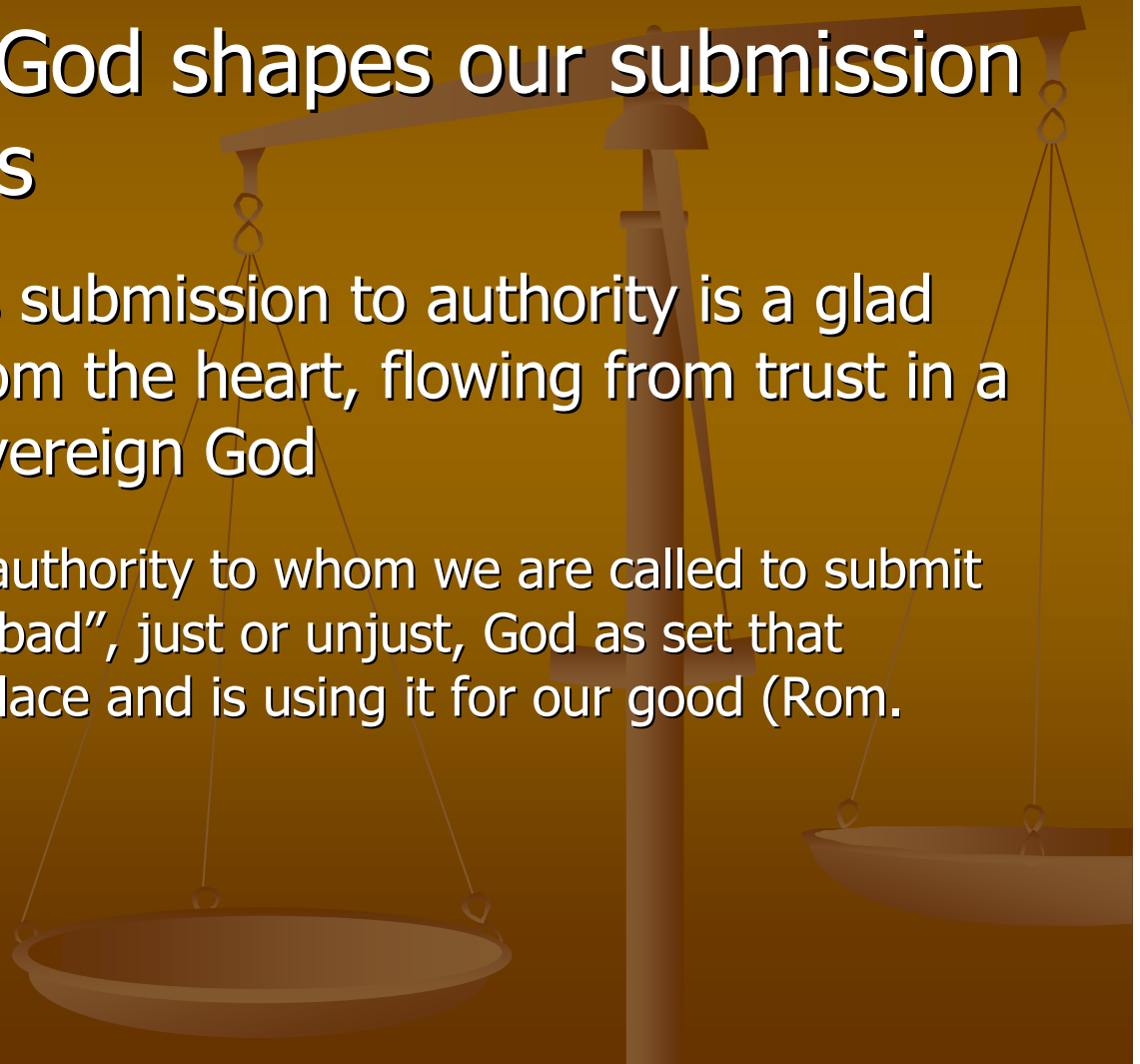


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6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- the Christian's submission to authority is a glad submission from the heart, flowing from trust in a loving and sovereign God
- whether the authority to whom we are called to submit is "good" or "bad", just or unjust, God has set that authority in place and is using it for our good (Rom. 13:1-4)



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Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- we obey the governing authorities insofar as they do not command what God has forbidden, or forbid what God has commanded

e.g. Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego “defied the king’s command” when commanded to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3)

e.g. Peter & the apostles, when the Sanhedrin forbade them to preach Christ, said, “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29b)

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Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- we need to be very clear from Scripture about what God actually commands or forbids us to do
 - need to be sure that if we disobey the authorities, it is actually out of obedience to God, not out of our own desires

“Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.” (1 Pet. 2:16)

“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?” (1 Pet. 2:20a)

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Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- we need to be very clear from Scripture about what God actually commands or forbids us to do
 - the place of conscience ('conscientious objection')
 - we should not act against conscience (1 Cor. 8:10-12)
 - BUT our consciences are corrupted by the Fall (Titus 1:15) and thus not necessarily a reliable guide (1 Cor. 4:4)
 - our consciences need to be informed by the Word of God (Rom. 12:1; 1 Tim. 1:3-5)

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me." – Martin Luther

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Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- we need to be careful not 'to do evil that good might result' (e.g. use of threats/intimidation)

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." (1 Pet. 2:16)

- we must remember that our methods and ultimate goals are not the same as those of the world

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (1 Cor. 10:3-4)

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6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- when situations arise in which we must disobey those in authority in order to obey God...
- we should do so, not in a spirit of pride or belligerence or hostility, but in a spirit of humility, and with respect

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." (Titus 3:1-2)

→ in a manner befitting slaves of Christ

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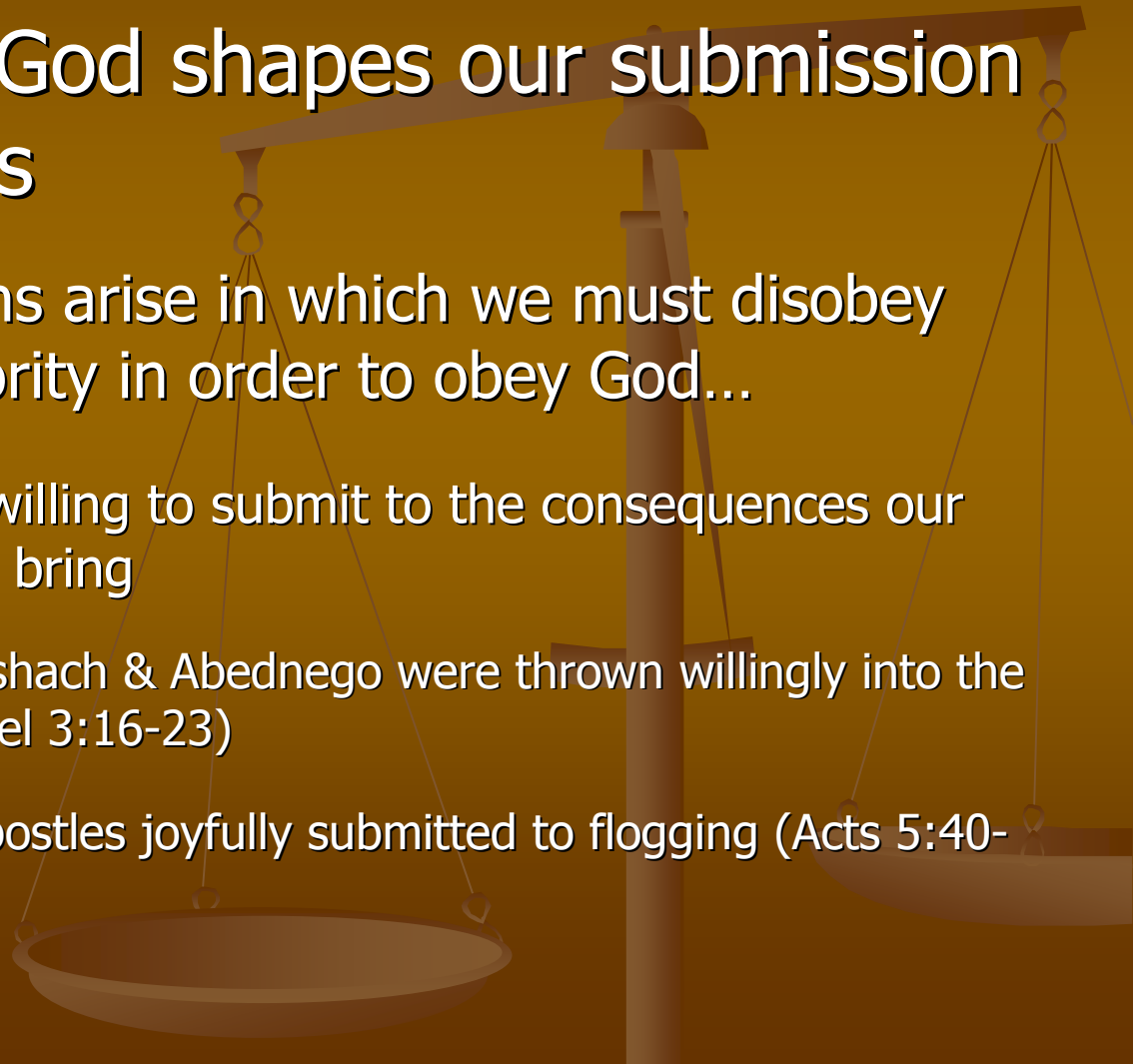
Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- when situations arise in which we must disobey those in authority in order to obey God...
 - we must be willing to submit to the consequences our actions might bring

e.g. Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego were thrown willingly into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:16-23)

e.g. Peter & the apostles joyfully submitted to flogging (Acts 5:40-41)



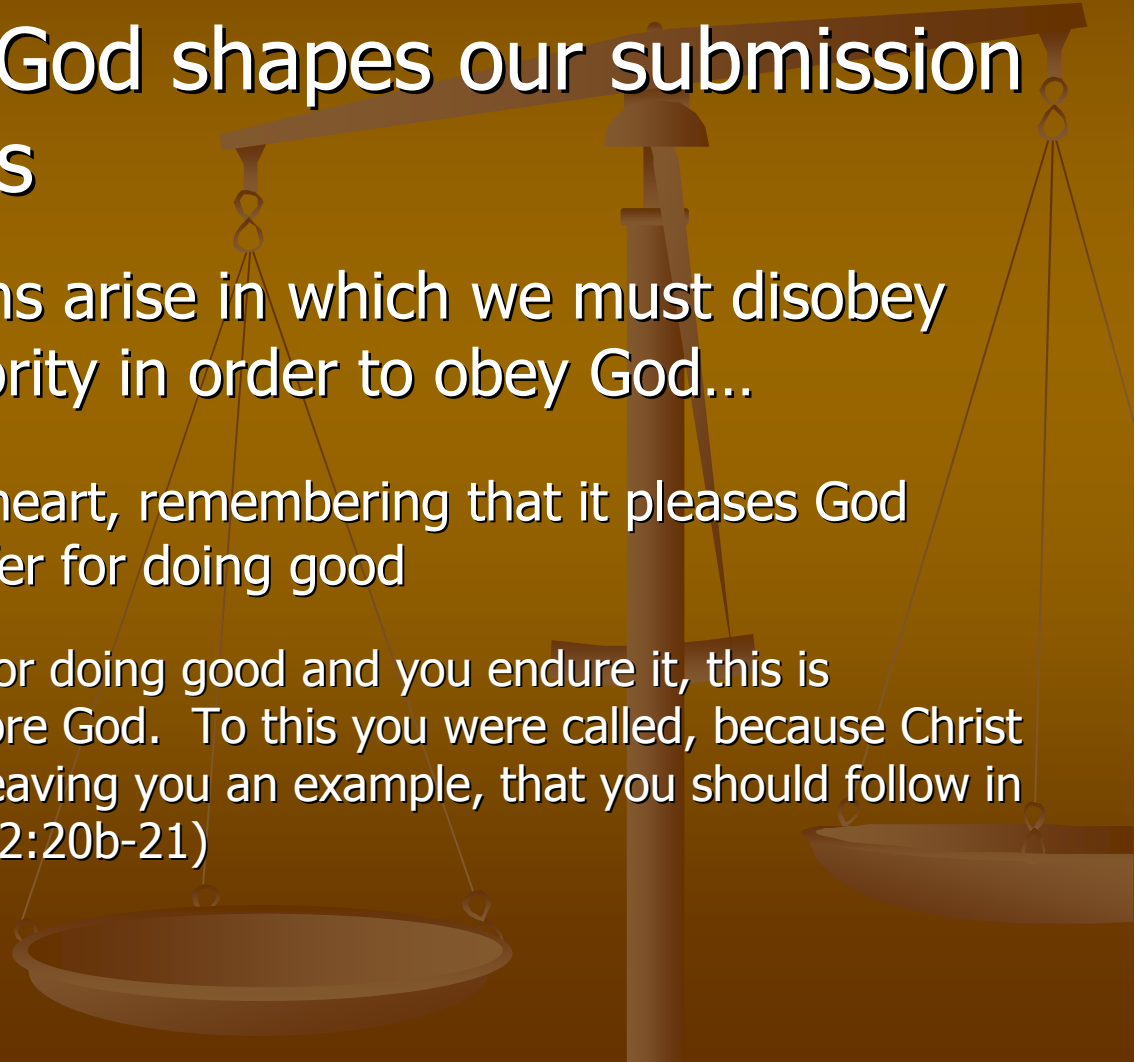
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Scriptural Principles

6. Submission to God shapes our submission to governments

- when situations arise in which we must disobey those in authority in order to obey God...
 - we can take heart, remembering that it pleases God when we suffer for doing good

“But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:20b-21)



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- Some questions to ask ourselves when considering 'civil disobedience'
 - What are my motives for doing this? Is what I am doing/planning to do truly honoring to God?
 - Do I genuinely desire to submit to the authorities? Are my attitudes to them truly ones that honor them and are thankful for them? Do my actions reflect those attitudes?

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- Some questions to ask ourselves when considering 'civil disobedience'
 - Is this really something God is commanding, or is it just what I think or want? Or something the world says I should be doing? What Scriptural basis do I have for what I am doing?
 - What testimony will my actions give to those who see them? Will what I am doing "silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15), or just give them more fuel for the fire?



"The tone and demeanor of this Christian civil disobedience will be the opposite of strident, belligerent, rock-throwing, screaming, swearing, violent demonstrations.

"We are people of the cross. Our Lord submitted to crucifixion willingly to save his enemies. We owe our eternal life to him. We are forgiven sinners. This takes the swagger out of our protest. It takes the arrogance out of our resistance. And if, after every other means has failed, we must disobey for the sake of love and justice, we will first remove the log from our own eye, which will cause enough pain and tears to soften our indignation into a humble, quiet, but unshakeable, NO. The greatest battle we face is not overcoming unjust laws, but becoming this kind of people."

- John Piper

For further reading

- Some good sermons with slightly differing viewpoints, see

- John MacArthur

- "The Christian and Government" series

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermon+Series/127>

- John Piper

- Sermon series in Romans 13:1-7

<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/211> Subjection to God and Subjection to the State Part 1/

<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/214> Subjection to God and Subjection to the State Part 2/

<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/215> Subjection to God and Subjection to the State Part 3/

<http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/216> Subjection to God and Subjection to the State Part 4/

