

## What Does The Bible Say About Submitting To Governmental Authority?

The following are just a few Scriptures and commentaries from the New King James Version of The MacArthur Study Bible which concern the subject of how Christians are to submit to governmental authority.

**Romans 13:1-7** says “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. <sup>4</sup> For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. <sup>5</sup> Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

The MacArthur Study Bible states that for **Romans 13:1** the Greek word for “be subject” was used of a soldier’s absolute obedience to his superior officer. Scripture makes one exception to this command: when obedience to civil authority would require disobedience to God’s Word (see Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:16-18; 6:7,10). Human government’s authority derives from and is defined by God. He instituted human government to reward good and to restrain sin in an evil, fallen world. **Romans 13:2** - Since all government is God-ordained, disobedience is rebellion against God. Judgment here is not God’s judgment, but punishment from the government for breaking the law. **Romans 13:3** - Even the most wicked, godless governments act as a deterrent to crime. Peaceful, law-abiding citizens need not fear the authorities. Few governments will harm those who obey their laws. In fact, governments usually commend such people. **Romans 13:4** - This “bear the sword” symbolizes the government’s right to inflict punishment on wrongdoers - especially capital punishment. The “to execute wrath” is not God’s wrath, but the punishment inflicted by the civil authorities. **Romans 13:5** - The “for conscience’ sake” means out of a sense of obligation to God and to keep a clear conscience before Him, not merely to avoid punishment from the civil authorities. **Romans 13:6** - God ordained human government and demands submission to it. Jesus explicitly taught that taxes are to be paid-even to the pagan Roman government (Matthew 22:17-21). **Romans 13:7** - Paul reiterates that paying taxes is mandatory. God demands that we show sincere respect and an attitude of genuine high esteem for all public officials.

**1 Timothy 2:1-3** says “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”

The MacArthur Study Bible states that because so many powerful and influential political rulers are hostile to God, they are often the targets of bitterness and animosity. But Paul urges believers to pray that these leaders might repent of their sins and embrace the gospel. “Quiet” refers to the absence of external disturbances; “peaceable” refers to the absence of internal ones. While it remains uncompromising in its commitment to the truth, the church is not to agitate or disrupt the national life. When it manifests love and goodness to all and prays passionately for the lost, including rulers, the church may experience a certain amount of religious freedom. Persecution should only be the result of righteous living, not civil disobedience. “Godliness” indicated that there needed to be a call back to holy living. Godliness refers to having the proper attitude and conduct before God in everything; “reverence” can be translated “moral earnestness,” and refers to moral dignity and holy behavior before men.