



"Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself."

—Leo Tolstoy

11-Oct-19

Submission (Part Two)

In Part One, we considered [Romans 13:1-7](#), the apostle Paul's instruction on Christian submission to governmental authority, concluding that Paul was encouraging church members to live at peace in [the world](#). We also saw that his stance parallels the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" ([Exodus 20:12](#)).

Baptist Pastor V. Mark Smith writes in a blog post, "The [fifth] commandment stands at the head of all human relationships. The next four commandments proceed with directions for the treatment of our fellow man." He then cites seventeenth-century clergyman Ezekiel Hopkins, who wrote that God's teaching in the fifth commandment gives us

the basis for handling all spheres of influence, that is the relationship to those in authority, the relationship of those in authority to their inferiors, and the lateral relationships of those who are our equals. The fifth commandment reflects the first sphere, namely, how do we respond to those in authority?

The command is more complex than imagined because it encompasses all authorities, not just the authority of parents. The scope is broad starting with [God](#) who gave the commandment, down to every relationship of every kind in which others are placed over us in the societal order. The command is difficult because of our natural resistance to authority. . . . The rejection of God filters down into reluctant submission to all authorities. For this reason, children must be trained to respect their parents. If we fail here in the second greatest level of authority, there is no hope for the final commandments to be obeyed.

In a 2009 article, "The Fifth Commandment," John Ritenbaugh wrote something similar:

Those trained in the home to dishonor parents will resist authority on every front, whether civic authorities, supervisors on the job, teachers in school, or coaches of a team. Self-centeredness stands at the foundation of this action. Those so created will pay little attention to honoring community standards because they do not respect them. Thus, they will not discipline themselves to submit to them. They always think they know what is best for them and for everybody else too. They will follow whatever impulse drives them, regardless of how it affects others.

God is a God of order. Even after [Satan](#) rebelled, God left him in his position of authority here on earth. Any nation without leadership—even corrupt leadership—soon finds itself in a state of anarchy and chaos. Anarchy is "a state of disorder due to absence or nonrecognition of authority." Although not speaking specifically about secular governments, [I Corinthians 14:33](#) declares the overarching principle that God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

God has a plan for mankind's salvation, and it includes allowing mankind to run its entire mutinous course. Not a single government on this earth has

God's law as its foundation. We cannot personally change the direction that this world is going, but we may be in danger of changing our own course if we rebel!

We also learned in Part One about the Roman emperor Nero, who was about as corrupt as any earthly king could be—even to the point of blaming and punishing Christians for the AD 64 fire that heavily damaged Rome (which some believe he caused) and later killing Paul himself. Yet the apostle instructed his protégé, Timothy, to pray regularly for Nero:

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, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ([I Timothy 2:1-4](#))

How did having this attitude help Paul? After all, Nero beheaded him just ten years after his epistle to the Romans and only a few years after his letter to Timothy. Paul explains in [I Corinthians 15:31](#) that he died every single day; he gave himself as a living sacrifice ([Romans 12:1](#)). Nero did not determine the time of the apostle's death; God did. Nothing that any man could have done would have prevented or altered his lot. Paul had learned not to challenge the course of the world (see [John 18:36](#) in this light). God had changed Paul's course and taught him submission to His authority and sovereign will. In turn, he teaches these lessons to us.

We did not choose our parents. We can only choose to obey God's commandment to honor and submit to their God-given authority ([Ephesians 6:1](#)). Likewise, we do not choose our national or local leaders, our bosses, or many other authority figures in our lives. Even so, we are to submit, honor, and obey them as well in deference to the authority of the true Ruler of the world.

Recall our Savior's words in [John 16:33](#): "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me [you may have peace](#). In the world you will have tribulation; but

be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He did so because His words and example are based on the first commandment with promise: He honored His Father first and completely.

Though we cannot change the course of this world, we cannot let its controversies derail us. *The International Standard Version* renders [Ephesians 2:14](#) as, "For it is [Jesus] who is our peace. Through His mortality he made both groups one by tearing down the wall of hostility that divided them." In context, Paul was writing about Jewish and Gentile Christians, but we can apply this to our current political climate as well. Jesus did not die just for Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, or any particular political party. He died for *all* of mankind. We should not take sides in the world's political squabbles because we follow a Higher Power who is working to bring all humanity into peace and ultimately oneness with Him.

So, what does Paul teach us to do to obtain and maintain true peace? We are to submit to authority and set a proper example toward everyone around us. We do this by following his example, as well as that of our Savior, [Jesus Christ](#). Both submitted to God and to human leaders and then trusted in the power of God to bring about the right outcome.

Romans 13 shows us that, if we also can embrace, honor, and submit to our heavenly Father's unseen leadership in this world and in our lives, we will have the confidence—the promise—of peace in our lives. We also need to have [patience](#) and accept the dominion of God in our lives as we actively work on changing the only things that we truly can change: ourselves. The Bride of Christ makes herself ready ([Revelation 19:7](#)). And we can do all this in hope. As Herbert Armstrong said, "I looked at the end of the Book, and we win!"

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Submitting \(Part 2\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

If everyone seeks his own gratification at the expense of the general welfare (family, church, society) conflict is inevitable (James 4:1). Because God sanctions all authority (Romans 13:1, I Peter 2:13), the only way a society can work (family, church, civil) is for everyone to submit to one another in the fear of Christ. Biblical submission is the respecting of divinely appointed authority out of respect for Christ. Our model of submission should be after the manner of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:6-8). Submission is an act of faith in God, and an act of love for all concerned.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Promise in the Fifth Commandment \(Part Two\)](#)

by David F. Maas

As our society continues to crumble around us, most analysts of the situation point the finger of blame at the destruction of the family. When the fifth commandment is neglected, David Maas insists, respect for leadership and authority erodes, lowering quality of life, and ultimately, length of life too.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
