

It Is Written

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HOW DO YOU SUBMIT TO A CORRUPT GOVERNMENT?

By Jeffrey Hamilton

Question:

I appreciate your Biblically sound responses.

As I observe the turmoil our nation is experiencing right now my thoughts are continually on the following topics:

- 1. submitting to government authority even though we may not like what is happening with all the corruption and dishonesty because God has established governments for a reason and*
- 2. standing up for what is right and taking a firm stance against evil.*

I realize that God has put governments here for a reason and that we must obey authority even though we do not always agree with their decisions because this is what the Lord expects of us. I also understand that the times where we are not to obey the government is when they would have us go against God's commands. However, I know the Lord expects us to speak out against evil and sin and to not compromise when we are in the right. After reading the sermon on "Rules for Prosperity and Success" I see many important points that are relevant to what is going on right now in our government such as attempts to bring down those who speak truth, people forsaking truth for compromise and appeasement because they want to avoid trouble, people trying to gain power through lies and deception, etc. Another important point that stood out to me from this sermon is that God did not give us the spirit of timidity and we must be confident that we are doing what is right when we take a firm stance against evil.

My question is how do I fit this all together and submit to the government since all authority comes from God while also taking a firm stance against evil and the perversion of truth? Knowing that the cowardly will not reach Heaven (Revelation 21:8) I certainly don't want to find myself settling for appeasement and compromise instead of standing firmly for truth. On the other hand, I definitely don't want to be guilty of opposing the government and therefore opposing God. I know that sometimes God uses corrupt individuals to accomplish His will and I also know of instances in the Bible where God's people expressed thoughts about their leaders. How do I balance speaking out with courage against evil committed by those in government but not tread into opposing the government and thus opposing God and His purpose?

Thank you.

Answer:

The best example is Daniel. From a Jewish point of view, the Babylonian government was illegal. They took things that did not belong to them -- whole countries! Their only law is themselves. They didn't answer to anyone else. They were violent and destructive. They believed that might made them right (Habakkuk 1:6-11). And yet Daniel served in this nation's government and the empire that conquered it. He was the lone example of an incorruptible official (Daniel 6:4-5). His integrity put him at odds with his fellow bureaucrats. Daniel submitted to the government but he never compromised his moral or religious beliefs. When Daniel was asked to read the message from God for Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, who was a foolish party animal, Daniel was polite but he didn't soften his message (Daniel 5:17-28).

Regardless of whether you think the current government is in place by honest or dishonest means, it is the government for the moment. God has reasons for His choice. Therefore we treat God's choice in leadership with respect and politeness.

However, at the same time, we state the truth. We don't change the truth, whether we admire the current leadership or think they are fools. When something immoral is done, we speak out against it -- politely but firmly. When laws are made contrary to the Laws of God, we ignore the laws of men and continue serving God (Acts 5:29).

Ecclesiastes 8 contains a lot of advice on how to deal with government leaders. The general rule is that we obey our leaders because of our covenant with God (Ecclesiastes 8:2). But we never follow a leader into doing evil (Ecclesiastes 8:3). We have to understand that we aren't rulers. Rulers will do as they please, regardless of whether we support them or not. Thus, the advice is that we don't walk out on a ruler because we don't like him. Someone needs to continue advocating for righteousness.

Rulers have big egos so understand that people in power don't like to have their commands questioned (Ecclesiastes 8:4). Notice that not following a sinful command is different than questioning a leader. When you stand for the truth, you are saying there is a higher law that must be followed. When you question a leader, you are saying he wasn't smart and didn't think things through. It might be the truth, but you don't question a ruler's decision -- even his bad decisions. The time for input is before the decision is made. Thus, the wise person deals with bad decisions by using the proper procedures at the proper time (Ecclesiastes 8:5).

Another thing we have to keep in mind is that none of us know the future (Ecclesiastes 8:7). What looks like a bad choice might actually turn out better than we thought. What looks like a good choice might end in disaster. Therefore, arguing for or against a matter based on how you guess things will work out is a weak argument.

Next, we need to remember that we aren't in control. We might see that the current leadership is poor and making horrible decisions, but we usually aren't in a position to do anything about it (Ecclesiastes 8:8). What we can count on is that evil is self-destructive. "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God" (Ecclesiastes 8:11-12). Therefore, we stay the course of righteousness regardless of who is in power. The evil will fail and the righteous will be around to pick up the pieces.

What Does God Want?

By Leon Mauldin

Have you ever struggled with this question, "What does God want from me?" Different answers are given. Some conclude that what God wants is for us to be good people morally. Others suppose that if they make a monetary contribution to a church, that surely God will be pleased. Still others would presume that if they donate some of their time to a good cause, that surely God's intentions for them would be satisfied.

There is some validity to each of these answers. God does require moral purity in heart, thought, word, dress and conduct. Further, Christians are told to give generously each first day of the week, that the work God has assigned to the church may be discharged (I Corinthians 16:1-2). And certainly the command to redeem the time calls for careful and wise stewardship of each day that God grants unto us (Ephesians 5:16).

But if we stop with any one or even all of these, we have fallen short of what God really wants.

The story is told of the pig and chicken who observed the plight of a poor, hungry man. They were moved with compassion for him. "I think we should give him a meal," said the chicken. "Me, too," the pig responded. "What did you have in mind?" "Well," replied the chicken, "I thought we would give him some ham and eggs!" To which the pig retorted, "Now wait a minute. I'll have to think about that a while. What you are proposing requires only a donation from you, but it calls for total commitment from me!" My friend, what God wants is not so much a donation from you; what He wants is YOU!

When Paul described the Christians of Macedonia, he said they "first gave themselves to the Lord" (II Corinthians 8:5). That, my friend, is the key to it! What God wants from you is an attitude that says, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears" (I Samuel 3:9). What God wants is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Have you given yourself to the Lord?