

WEEK 3: WHEN SHOULD CHRISTIANS DISOBEY THE GOVERNMENT?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

The apostle Paul instructed Christians in Rome to submit to all the governing authorities, and he wrote those words when Nero, an evil tyrant who killed his own mother and burned his own city, was the emperor. Yet there are other passages where God's people refused to obey their earthly leaders because the earthly kings were asking God's people to disobey their eternal king. How do we know when to obey and when to disobey the leaders of our day and the leaders in the land?

LEAN IN BREAK THE ICE

When you were a child, were you more likely to follow rules, push boundaries, or find a balance between the two?

LOOK DOWN LOOK AT GOD'S WORD

Read Acts 5:27-29, Romans 13:1-3

Acts 5:27-29

27 After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, 28 “Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.” 29 Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people.”

Romans 13:1-3

1 Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. 2 So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God’s command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval.

Read Romans 13:1-3. How would you explain Paul's main point in your own words? What do you think he wants Christians to understand about government authority?

In John 19:11, Jesus says this: “‘You would have no authority over me at all,’ Jesus answered him, ‘if it hadn’t been given you from above. This is why the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.’” What does this verse tell us about God’s relationship with earthly authority? How do you see God’s sovereignty at work even when human systems fail or act unjustly?

Read Acts 5:27-29. Peter and the apostles said, “We must obey God rather than human beings.” How do they balance respect for authority with obedience to God?

LOOK OUT
IDENTIFY THE
RELEVANCE OF GOD'S
WORD IN THE WORLD

What are the most common reasons people want to commit acts of “civil disobedience” (meaning, disobeying government authority without the intent to harm anyone)?

What are some important biblical principles that should be considered as we decide if we should obey or disobey a government authority? How do we obey joyfully when we can and disobey courageously when we must?

LOOK IN
APPLY GOD'S WORD
TO YOUR LIFE

In what ways do you find it challenging or easy to submit to government authorities? What experiences, fears, or convictions shape your perspective?

What are some ways we can pray together right now, and throughout the coming week, for our governing authorities?

Leader Notes

This section helps you grasp the key themes and intended outcomes of the discussion before you lead your group. These notes are not the group questions; they simply guide your preparation so you can lead with clarity and shepherd the conversation well. You may also find them helpful at the end of your discussion to wrap up your time together.

Think About It

Who or what most influences your understanding of authority—your upbringing, your experiences, political voices, Scripture? How does that shape the way you see this topic?

What Will You Do?

What is one practical step you can take this week to live out a healthy, biblical posture toward authority, whether through prayer, obedience, advocacy, or seeking wisdom?

Changing Your Mind

...“We must obey God rather than people.” (Acts 5:29)