

Think About It: Making sense of the the most misunderstood and misused passages of the Bible

Part 3: Should Christians Obey the Government?

Acts 4:18-20 and 1 Peter 2:13-17

IN: Acts 4:18-20

- Yeah stick it to the man!
- Don't bow to evil governments! Go Peter & John!
- Stand up for your Faith!

1 Peter 2:13-14

- Wait what?
- What happened to you Pete?

Bible Contradiction!

Is it though? Often when it seems like we have a contradiction in the biblical writings... a little study can reveal something even better than what we think either passage is saying... so let's talk about it... together.

WE:

So much conflict and confusion comes from pitting one bible verse against another.

When we make verses stand on their own as separate ideas/thoughts/commands/instructions, we can make the BW's say pretty much anything we want, use them to justify just about anything we want...

And in the process we start seeing verses that seem to contradict...

So we either ignore the parts that we think we disagree with, explain them away trying to make them mean what they never meant to the original author, or just give up on the whole thing.

Might be part of the reason you or someone you care about has or is ready to give up on this whole "Xianity" thing. People just pick and choose what they want, claim it's THE truth, force this TRUTH on others, and fight anyone who disagrees.

It might seem daunting... but there is a way forward... and it's not as complicated as we might think.

If we take a little bit of time to see passages within their historical context and the context of the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world, we can find guidance and truth that has transformed lives and communities for 1000's yrs.

So let's take this one apparent contradiction and find out what is going on... and afterward we might have some tools to use when we come across other seemingly contradictory texts.

So... Should we obey the government or not?

What if they are bad? Even evil? Actively against the Church?

What we will find is... **Seeing the big picture of the biblical writings helps us navigate our big questions.**

GOD: Let's frame our problem here...

In the book of Acts we have a passage describing how P&J stood up to the authorities and told them to their face they will disobey b/c God tells them to.

While in 1 Peter we have the same Peter saying JF's need to obey the government as obedience to Jesus.

Let's use our study rhythm to see if we can sort this out...

Discover Genre and Historical Context

[Encyclopedia at Bible Gateway.com](#) Bibleproject.com also great

Acts- Narrative

- Describes what happened with a point behind it. Doesn't necessarily Prescribe.
 - Can get examples but not meant to be an instruction book.
- Written by Luke (Paul's companion), 60's AD, to explain what Jesus did after his R through HS and Church... what it meant for the KoG to arrive and how Jesus invited the world to join

1 Peter- Epistle: Explaining to JF's what it means to be living in the KoG, following the Law of Christ (LOVE) in daily life.

Peter old, 60's AD. Writing in Rome.

Peter commissioned letter... but was composed by man named Silvanus... that's right my great great great grandfather maybe

Church has spread/grown over last 30 yrs. And is now facing opposition/harassment from pagan culture.

Peter wrote to encourage them and instruct how to live as exiles (what talked about last episode)

So first off- we see that we are dealing with two different types of literature from two different authors.

Meaning they will probably say/teach things in different ways... The same principle might be at play but seen through different lenses.

Due to their literary diversity, the BW's often give us big ideas from many different angles.

BUT is that what is happening here? Or is it just wishful thinking? Let's keep going...

Read the Context of the Whole Text

Acts: paraphrase context...

Jesus starts church... tells disciples to be his witnesses that KoG has arrived in Jesus.

HS comes - Disciples explain what has happened - People believe - Church forms

One day P&J go to temple and heal crippled beggar (proving that KoG has arrived through Jesus) - People amazed - Peter preaches about J...

Priests/Temple guards/Sadducees hear... not happy. They had dealt w/ this Jesus guy... they thought.

Arrest them/next day all religious leaders including high priest question them... so P starts preaching to *them*

Leaders amazed by boldness and remembered who they were with

Authorities: "What do we do to stop them?" "Ummm tell them to stop and threaten them"

P&J: "We can't, we won't, and we don't stop."

That's the story we find ourselves in, in the book of Acts

1 Peter: Paraphrase context

Explains, b/c of JF's trust in Jesus, they have become a new people... no longer merely citizens of the place they live... citizens of KoG...

With a new role: to be God's temple/holy priests to show the world the goodness/love of God through Jesus... **JF's are representatives of Jesus to the rest of the world.**

And Peter specifically tells them... how they act during persecution will bear witness to Jesus and his kingdom... persecution offers a chance to show others the generous love of Jesus

So Peter encourages his readers to "get rid of all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy and unkind speech,"

Tells them to resist evil by showing love and generosity- not by fighting

Encourages them to live properly among their unbelieving neighbors so that even if they accuse them of doing wrong they will see their honorable behavior and end up honoring God themselves.

Then as an example of how to do that we have our passage...

1 Peter 2:13-14

Engage the Text

Ask Questions: Most important can ask BW's WHY?

Why did author include this? Why saying this? Why does this character do/say what they do?

So... WHY is Peter saying submit? For the Lord's sake.

- **A JF's peaceful submission to human authority honors Jesus' universal authority.**

Leads to other Q's

What does Peter mean by Submit? **Blue Letter Bible**

- Submit- subject one's self, obey, yield (dangit)

Submit to whom? All human authority... King/Officials

Who is king? 60's AD? Dictionary/Google search... Nero. What know about him? Not good. Had Peter killed.

So **WHY** is P saying submit?

V. 15-17 Peter saying submit...To silence those who make false accusations against them.

Living in a time where people were starting to turn hostile to JF's... and as we saw earlier Peter is showing them what it looks like to live in the KoG now... while also living a culture/kingdom that was not the KoG.

Saying, "Yes you are free in Jesus. You are not less than anyone, you are a citizen of the true kingdom and belong to THE King who possesses all authority... so you are free to CHOOSE to submit and earn the respect of those who don't follow Jesus.

Now let's engage our other passage... **Acts...**

What P&J refusing to do?

- Stop telling people what they saw... Jesus coming back from the dead.

WHY are they refusing to stop?

Jesus had told them to be his witnesses... "We can't help it. We have to obey."

- Their priority was to continue bringing the KoG to earth by being Jesus' witnesses.
- They say they don't have a choice... but they are Respectful

So we are seeing that possibly Peter's encouragement to submit might have a bigger WHY behind it then simple blind obedience.

And P&J's disobedience might have a bigger WHY behind it than simply refusing to obey evil/illegitimate leaders...

But before we go and start making our own assumptions we need to make sure people with a lot more experience with these passages have come to similar conclusions... So next step...

Ask the Experts

A few examples due to time constraint...

1 Peter I Howard Marshall:

"Christians are to be strangers and pilgrims so far as the sinful way of life of the world is concerned; but where it is a case of doing good, they are to take an active part."

Acts William J Larkin Jr. (p. 76) [The gist is they are respectful yet must obey Jesus whose law is higher]

So we see that P&J disobey the authorities (respectfully) in Acts not b/c the authorities are inept, unfair, or making decisions they disagree with...

But b/c they are telling P&J to stop doing what Jesus specifically told them to do...

Be witnesses of the Good News that Jesus defeated the power of sin and death and has brought the KoG to earth and all people are invited to join.

And in 1 Peter, Peter is telling his readers to submit... not b/c he thinks the authorities are great people and he agrees with their politics...

but in order to be witnesses of the Good News that Jesus defeated the power of sin and death and has brought the KoG to earth and all people are invited to join.

Good commentaries will also take us to some other passages that relate give us a bigger picture of what BW's present... like Moses' midwives in Exodus, Rahab and Jewish spies in Joshua, Daniel and friends, Paul in Rom 13... all talking about good civil disobedience and respecting authorities.

So after all of that...

Are these two passages conflicting?

I don't think so... they both point to a bigger truth that can guide our decisions today...

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the JF's priority is to represent their true King and invite others into his kingdom.

JF's primary lens through which to view the world, their neighbors, and their own actions are not the political/cultural lens around us, but the lens of the KoG and its values/priorities.

- Which are... People. And showing the love of God to all people.

JF's are called to be best citizens, agents of good, working to improve the community. Making and Keeping peace within communities.

Offering a difference/alternative from the anger/fear/division/winning over others by force that drives the kingdoms around them

The NT writings are constantly bringing up this idea of living as peacefully as we can and impressing those around us with our love for and submission to each other and the world around us.

But this priority will often bring them into conflict with those other kingdoms who want everyone to play by their rules and live for their priorities of power/wealth/status quo for those in charge.

And when that conflict comes, JF's must stay true to their true identity/priority.

This might require speaking out against injustice, standing up for the oppressed, using whatever privilege/authority we may have for the good of the forgotten/weak/marginalized... and in some instances talking about Jesus when illegal.

When a JF is dealing with a human authority figure, the question is:

What will best display Jesus and his Kingdom?

- Very similar to... What does love look like?

There are times it's ok to disobey in order to love... rare times.

- EX. Underground railroad, freeing slaves
- Closed countries- being JF's and telling other about J in mainland China/North Korea/Strict muslim countries- Killed for faith.
- There's a reason most of the apostles were executed.

In most cases for us, however, if the gov isn't ordering JF's to directly disobey Jesus or go contrary to his command to love as he loved- respectful submission is our primary response... even if we disagree.

Gotquestions.org has a really [good article](#) on Xian Civil Disobedience if you want to dig deeper. We'll put link in show notes.

Now our final step...

Do Something with It

If you are a JF... **ASK:** Which kingdom is my priority?

We all know the "right" answer but what is the TRUE answer?

Test- When your candidate loses how do you react?

When the gov makes decision you disagree with what is your reaction?

Do people know/hear more about who you vote for than who you worship?

Last one... Do you see people/issues through the lens of liberal/conservative or KoG/kingdom of world?

If not Jf... ponder- which kingdom would bring the society you want you and/or your kids to live in?

If seriously want to make KoG your priority... encourage you (with good tools) **read through 1 Peter** this week.

And **pray... Jesus, Show me how to have KoG as my priority.**

WE: When we read the BW's we can't take a single verse, ignore its context, and create an entire theology and lifestyle around it.

But when we look at passages within the larger picture of God's kingdom we see a clearer picture of who Jesus is and what our role in his kingdom is.

It is a kingdom every single person is invited to be a part of.

It is the first and only kingdom whose law is to love our neighbors as our king has loved us

It is a kingdom based on what love looks like for everyone. From the least to the greatest (and then completely switches the meaning of both of those words).

It is the kingdom that brings true life, peace, justice, and love... even in the middle of earthly kingdoms that are often opposed to the Kingdom of God

This is the kingdom the Bible's point us to... so let's study them b/c...

When read in context, the Bible's can guide us to bring the Kingdom of God to our context now.

Summary:

Should Christians obey the government? Taken on their own, some biblical passages say "yes" while others imply "no"... but do these passages actually contradict each other? Often, when it seems like we have a contradiction in the biblical writings a little study can reveal something even better than what we think either passage is saying.

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out, bothered, challenged you from this week's episode?
2. Have you ever been "stuck" between bible verses or biblical ideas that seem to contradict? If so, how did/do you navigate finding a solution?
3. When you hear the phrase "The Kingdom of God," what comes to mind? How would you explain this idea to someone who has never heard it?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. In our current context, how do you think we can live out being citizens of God's Kingdom AND submission to our authorities?
5. How can your group pray for you this week?

Main Points:

- So much conflict and confusion comes from pitting one bible verse against another.
- Seeing the big picture of the biblical writings helps us navigate our big questions.
- Due to their literary diversity, the biblical writings often give us big ideas from many different angles.
- Jesus Followers are representatives of Jesus to the rest of the world.
- A Jesus Follower's peaceful submission to human authority honors Jesus' universal authority.
- As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Jesus Follower's priority is to represent their true King and invite others into his kingdom.
- When a Jesus Follower is dealing with a human authority figure, the question is:
 - What will best display Jesus and his Kingdom?
 - When read in context, the biblical writings can guide us to bring the Kingdom of God to our context now.

Weekly Challenge:

Ask: Which kingdom is my priority?

Read: 1 Peter this week (with tools?)

Pray: Jesus, Show me how to have your Kingdom of God as my priority.

Episode Resources:

Dictionary/Encyclopedia: www.biblegateway.com and www.blueletterbible.com

Genre/Narrative/Theme Videos: www.bibleproject.com/

The Christian & Civil Disobedience: <https://www.gotquestions.org/civil-disobedience.html>

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SHOW NOTES

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Music: Headhunters, by Herbie Hancock <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m3qOD-hhrQ>

 | READ THE TRANSCRIPT → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/media/2022-07-17.pdf>

 | SAY HELLO, ASK A QUESTION → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/welcome/>

 | JOIN A GROUP → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/#connect>

 | FOR SALEM in JULY → Hope Pregnancy Clinic

We are collecting diapers (size NB to 6), wipes and baby board books at our gatherings in July. You can also shop direct via their wishlists. Find out more about Hope Pregnancy Clinic here: <https://hopeforsalem.org/>

Amazon wishlist: <https://a.co/3rn8zPt>

Target wishlist: <https://www.target.com/gift-registry/giftgiver?registryId=b09b19f2118e4ce1ba38d81b204d0237>

 | FOR SALEM in AUGUST → Ice Cream FOR Everyone

Meet at Wes Bennett Park in South Salem on Sunday, August 21st to hand out free ice cream in the afternoon. Why? Because God loves them, and loves to give gifts. More details forthcoming, but mark your calendar.

 | GATHER TOGETHER → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/#gathering> |
Upcoming Dates: July 24th and August 14th + 28th

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