

Liberty University

**Submission to the State as an Act of Submission to God:
A Call for Total Submission Within the Nature and Commands of God**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Bible Exposition

by

Jesse David Krystowiak

Lynchburg, Virginia

September 2022

Contents

Introduction	1
Thesis Statement.....	3
Overview of Views Concerning the Church and the State.....	4
A New Perspective.....	6
Biblical Passages to Be Used.....	9
Process to Establish the Foundational Principle.....	11
Focus of this Dissertation.....	17
Goals for this Dissertation.....	20
Historical Theology Survey	23
Introduction.....	23
The Early Church.....	25
Cultural Setting of the Church.....	25
Tertullian of Carthage.....	27
Clement of Alexandria.....	30
Augustine of Hippo.....	32
The Reformation.....	37
Martin Luther.....	37
John Calvin.....	40
Huldrych Zwingli.....	43
John Knox.....	46

New England Pastors During the American Revolution	48
German Christians During World War 2	55
Modern Political Views in Conservative Evangelicalism in the United States	60
John MacArthur	61
Jonathan Leeman	64
Viewpoints on Submission to the State	67
Submission Only to Legitimate Government: Contractual Government.....	68
Limited Submission: Restricting the Extent of the Call to Submit.....	71
Sphere Authority: Competing Spheres of Derived Authority.....	73
Conclusion of Historical Perspective.....	75
Hermeneutical Approach	78
Methodology	80
Authorial Intent.....	81
Antecedent Theology	82
Exegetical Focus	83
Old Testament Narrative Exegesis.....	88
Theological Intent of the Author.....	88
Literary Indicators of the Text	89
Sermon on the Mount and Political Viewpoints.....	91
Historical Positions on the Sermon on the Mount	93
The Sermon on the Mount and the Book of Matthew	95

Conclusion	97
Old Testament Exegesis	99
Introduction.....	99
Joseph’s Testimony in Egypt.....	102
Joseph’s Situation and Mindset	103
Joseph as an Egyptian Official.....	108
Lessons from Joseph’s Civil Service	111
Daniel’s Testimony in Babylon	113
Daniel’s Situation and Mindset.....	114
Daniel’s Understanding of God	117
Daniel as an Official in Babylon.....	120
Lessons from Daniel’s Civil Service	126
Nehemiah’s Testimony as a Governor in Jerusalem.....	128
Nehemiah as the Governor of Jerusalem	130
Lessons from Nehemiah’s Civil Service.....	134
Cumulative Lessons from Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah	135
New Testament Exegesis	139
Obey God or Man?.....	140
The Meaning of ὑποτάσσω	142
Matthew 22:15-22 and Paying Taxes	147
A Question of Taxes	148

An Answer Concerning Image.....	149
A Greater Responsibility to God.....	151
Romans 13:1-7 and Submission to Governing Authorities	153
The Context for Romans 13:1-7	154
The Intention of Romans 13:1-7.....	158
The Application of Romans 13:1-7.....	161
The Significance of Romans 13:1-7	165
1 Peter 2:13-17 and Submission to Every Human Institution.....	166
The Instruction in 1 Peter 2:13-14	170
The Application of 1 Peter 2:13-17	173
Concluding Lessons from the New Testament	175
Biblical Theology for Submission to Civil Authorities	178
Submission to God as Direct Submission.....	179
Theological Truths While Submitting to the Government	183
Submission to the State as a Secondary Submission	183
Submission to the State as a Mindset.....	184
Quiet and Peaceful Submission to the State	186
Applying Submission to the State for the Church and Individual Believer.....	188
Role for the Church.....	188
Role for the Individual Christian	190
Confronting Unrighteousness in Society	191
Thesis Statement Revisited.....	195

Bibliography 198

Abbreviations

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
CBC	Cornerstone Biblical Commentary
CCE	Christ-Centered Exposition
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
LBRS	Lexham Bible Reference Series
LXX	Septuagint
MNTC	MacArthur New Testament Commentary
NAC	New American Commentary
NBBC	New Beacon Bible Commentary
NCCS	A New Covenant Commentary Series
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTTE	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIVAC	The New International Version Application Commentary
OTL	The Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PTW	Preaching the Word
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
SCDS	Studies in Christian Doctrines and Scripture
SGBC	The Story of God Bible Commentary
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary

TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
THNTC	The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
THOTC	The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Introduction

Christians live in this fallen world while clinging to the promise of living eternally in heaven with God. One can see the passion with which Christians should be looking forward to being in the presence of God in Philippians 1:21-25. In this passage, Paul reveals his great desire to be with God, yet he understands that his time on earth is for the betterment of the church as he serves Jesus. His life on earth was to be one of service to his Savior and to his fellow believers. One of the many difficulties which Christians face is how to live within the structures of society while looking forward to eternal life in heaven.

This tension of looking forward to being with God while serving Him on earth persists with every Christian throughout his or her earthly life. Christians remaining in this world are part of God's plan, and Jesus speaks of this in John 17:15 as He prays to the Father not to take the believers out of this world but to "keep them from the evil one." Richard Phillips underscores the great importance of sanctification for the goal of reaching into the world for the glory of Jesus.¹ One's sanctification is part of the growth for a believer who then is better able to evangelize through growth in Christ. One responsibility for Christians in this world is to make disciples of the nations as taught in Matthew 28:19-20, and to accomplish this mandate from God, Christians must interact with the rest of the world.² Added to this pursuit of making disciples for Jesus is the difficulty of remaining holy in a world given over to passions which war with the ways of God. In contrast to the wickedness in the world, Christians are to seek to be holy based on the holiness

¹ Richard Phillips, *John*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 450.

² John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 1256-1266.

of God (1 Peter 1:15-16) and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Jesus as their Savior.

These pursuits can run afoul of the unsaved, and this is especially true when those who are antagonistic to the gospel rise to positions of civil leadership and use their influence to try to push against the ways of God. Because of the call to make disciples of all of the nations, the Christian faith is necessarily a faith that is public and encompasses all aspects of life as believers seek to mold every action to the ways of God.³ Christians should not seek to keep their faith hidden but should live out every aspect of their lives for Christ publicly. Joseph Boot summarizes his perspective for how Christians should live when he wrote that “all of life is religious,” and this religious living must be oriented on the call of Christ in one’s life.⁴ Christians should not separate one part of their lives from what it means to live righteously. All of life is to be lived in light of the gospel of God, and one’s political interactions and submission to the state is included in this call to live for God. However, this all-encompassing faith puts Christians at odds with others who reject the gospel of Jesus, and conflict arises when these two opposing worldviews collide in the public arena.

Historically, Christians have struggled to apply what it means to submit to the government, as will be shown in the historical survey in the next chapter. This is especially true when Christians view government actions as reducing some freedoms in society, permitting practices which are antithetical to biblical decrees, and placing restrictions on regular church gatherings. How are Christians to respond to an ever-encroaching government or to a

³ Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 3.

⁴ Joseph Boot, *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society*, 2nd Edition (London, UK: Wilberforce Publications, 2016), 77.

government which promotes sinful practices? How is the command to submit to one's government still applicable in today's context? To offer an answer to these questions, one must understand the nature of the command to submit to God first and then to one's civil authorities.

Thesis Statement

Christians debate how believers should seek to influence those around them with the gospel, especially when it comes to their interactions with civil authorities. Throughout church history, Christians have faced both severe persecution at the hands of civil authorities and enjoyed the privileges of being part of a state-sponsored church. The church has had to decide whether or not to obey laws which go against their beliefs and has also been involved in the creation of laws which affect both Christians and unbelievers. These various situations can be seen throughout church history, and Christians have held a range of different beliefs for how the church should respond and interact with civil authorities based, in part, on the church's relationship with the government. As will be shown in the next chapter, these beliefs have ranged from a call to remove themselves from culture in order to remain pure for Christ to a call to enact legislation to force moral living on others. This dissertation will present the case for first establishing a foundational principle for all believers' interactions with civil government. This foundational principle and the thesis for this dissertation is that submission to one's civil authorities is ultimately submission to God and encompasses all directives of the civil authorities which do not explicitly go against God's commands or nature.

The primary distinctive point of this thesis statement relates to the direct line between one's submission to God and one's submission to the state. With the primary submission focused on serving God, the secondary line of submission is to the state which flows out of one's submission to God. Therefore, the act of submission will be shown to stem directly from one's

service to God. With this direct flow in mind, anything which disrupts one's ultimate submission to God, including one's submission to the state, must be rejected. This will be contrasted with sphere authority, a contract view of government, and a limited view of submission. The only aspect of life which must limit one's submission to the state is any command from the state which promotes an action or belief against God's commands or nature or prohibits actions commanded by God.

Overview of Views Concerning the Church and the State

Foundational to this issue of the relationship between the church and the state is the degree to which these two entities interact and which one, if either, is subordinate to the other. Arnold Koelpin illustrates the various views for the church and state's interaction by showing how these two spheres of influence can be either interacting with each other or separate from each other.⁵ The views range from uninvolved with each other to barely interacting with each other to one being subordinate to the other. This range represents the practical understanding and practice for most Christians on this issue. After explaining the various views, Koelpin does argue that the United States' constitution modifies this by offering both freedoms and a wall of separation from the state to the church.⁶

Another basis from which to understand the various systems in the religious world has been offered by Robert Webber. While admitting that "the typical responses to the problem appear superficial and without substance," he does adequately boil the issue down to a simple way to understand how Christians view their own interactions with the government as either

⁵ Arnold J Koelpin, "An American Application of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Realms: The Relationship of Government to the Institutional Church," *Logia* 12, no. 1 (2003): 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

indifferent, reactionary, or pious.⁷ These responses represent basic, default attitudes in the church as Christians can go with the flow of what is happening in their country, take strong stands against what their country is doing, or cloister away from what they view as unnecessary involvement with the government by focusing on piety. These reactions reveal ground level responses for how many view the fundamental interaction between the church and the state.

In practice, Christians primarily view this issue based on clashes that take place between spheres of influence. This can be viewed from the perspective of two spheres of influence, the church and the state as mentioned above, or it can be viewed from the perspective of two spheres of life: the church and the state. Most views concerning the Christian's interaction with the government focus on what to do when conflicts arise between these spheres of influence. What happens when one sphere oversteps its bounds and interferes with another sphere of life?

In summarizing the various perspectives, this dissertation will analyze past theologians or schools of thought on the basis of where they draw the line between obedience in their submission and disobedience or confrontation with the state. By knowing what line of practice and belief must not be crossed by the government, one can understand past believers' beliefs which informed their practice. Past Christians have also advocated for various degrees of involvement with their governments. In order to institute societal change, some Christians pushed for church control of the new government, some advocated to live quiet and peaceably under the new government, and some wanted just to live with a focus on their own spiritual lives. Understanding the line between obedience and confrontation will enable modern Christians to understand practical ramifications for one's interactions with civil authorities by showing what influenced past Christians in their formation of these views.

⁷ Robert Webber, *The Secular Saint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 26.

A New Perspective

Instead of focusing on how to work out conflicts between different realms of authority, this dissertation argues for a new perspective to take root in the church: the view of submission to the civil authorities as a direct response of one's submission to God. This must become the starting place for believers' interactions with the civil government, but the line of submission originates from God's nature and commands before being delegated to civil authorities.⁸ This origin in God enables Christians, in limited situations to be addressed later, to disobey the civil government when that government attempts to disrupt one's primary focus on complete submission to God. Christians must view all of life as submission to God, and from this starting position, Christians must view their own interactions with the civil government as secondary. If their submission to the state disrupts one's service to God, Christians must serve God to the detriment of their service to the state.

In many ways, this view harkens back to the first commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai. R. Alan Cole sees Exodus 20:3, the first commandment to have "no other gods before me," as commanding the people to "exclusive service of one God" while telling the people that God "will not share his worship with another."⁹ God demands for nothing else to take His place as God. From this perspective, Christians must not let service to or worship of anything else interrupt their complete dedication to God, and this includes the nature of their submission to the state. Following this line of thinking, Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 commands Christians to submit to their government, and the basis for this submission is rooted in God's

⁸ Aaron Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, & Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 676.

⁹ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus, TOTC* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 161-162.

delegated authority to human governments. The question should not be how to sort out the conflict between the church and the state but between these realms and God.

This perspective of submission views all of life as a direct line between God and His realms of delegated authorities. This requires the primary concern not to be on where does the authority of the church and the state end and the other sphere begins. Instead, the focus must be on whether or not these realms of delegated authority seek to overthrow God's commands or fight against His nature. For the sake of this dissertation, the focus will be placed specifically on how Christians are to submit to their own civil government as an act of submission to God. The starting position for Christians must be on complete submission and obedience to one's government unless obedience to one's government would cause a Christian to sin or keep a Christian from following God.

God has handed down directives which affect all of life, and this includes civil interactions and the church. God's commands for each part of life cannot contradict each other even when there is an apparent contradiction, yet the division of life into different spheres can blur the reality that ultimate submission is always to God. In His sovereign rule, He provides directives for all aspects of life. When anyone attempts to dictate a lifestyle that is contrary to God's commands, that person is attempting to usurp God. In terms of the government's role, a sinful directive does not strike primarily strikes at God's authority and not against another holder of derived authority from God. This is why submission to one's civil authorities is all-inclusive until government attempts to usurp God's kingship. In the context of living within the United States, Russell Moore points out an unhelpful and inaccurate blurring of the lines when Christians view the United States as a Christian nation which exists within covenants with God,

like the covenant in 2 Chronicles 7:14.¹⁰ The church should not be focusing on attempting to make America the new replacement for Israel as God's chosen nation. Instead, Christians should focus on the Bible's teaching that Christians are sojourners and aliens in this world.¹¹ As travelers in this world, Christians are called to represent their true home of heaven, and this purpose can lead to conflict as the nations of this world seek their own agendas.

This conflict with the state takes place because this world is full of sinful individuals who fight against God, but this does not mean Christians can pick and chose which laws to obey and which laws to disregard. This commitment to submission is rooted in God's character and nature. The biblical mandate of submission must dictate the way in which Christians actively live as citizens of heaven while still temporarily located within an earthly nation. The primary purpose for believers is to serve the Lord (Romans 12:1), yet God has also called for His people to submit to and honor those whom God has placed in a position of civil leadership (Romans 13:1). This dual citizenship, with the emphasis on one's eternal residence, represents a challenge for believers, but it is possible to submit in such a way as to keep the priority on following God's ways while being a light for Christ in a dark world.

Jeremiah offered some words of encouragement to the people of Israel before they became sojourners in a foreign nation. He told them to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7, English Standard Version). This instruction was given to a fearful people who had been taken into exile. Jeremiah's audience was facing great fear and turmoil as they were removed from their ancestral homeland as well as false prophets who were spreading

¹⁰ Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2015), 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

lies, and Jeremiah offered some guidance to them based on information God had given him.¹²

While the situation is specifically focused on the next upcoming exile, the same principle applies to Christians in the age of the church. Jesus left His followers in a foreign nation in order to act as ambassadors for His name. As ambassadors, believers are to live exemplary lives showing the holiness of God in every aspect of their lives. Of necessity, this includes their interactions with the civil leaders who are given their civil authority by God.

Biblical Passages to Be Used

To prove the need to maintain an attitude of submission to one's civil government, this dissertation will develop a biblical theology of submission to government. The goal is to not depend on just one or two passages but to incorporate the biblical arch on this topic. The danger of using only a single passage is similar to focusing on only one political issue as a Christian. When only one passage is used by a Christian, that Christian is in danger of creating his or her own ideology which is just part of a whole, and David Koyzis shows a strong connection between modern ideologies and identity politics to the biblical issue of idolatry.¹³ That one verse or issue could subjugate other parts of the Bible instead of developing the total message of the Bible for a topic.

Submission to God, which results in submission to one's civil authorities, is not a controversial topic among Christians on the surface, especially in the United States where Christians have enjoyed religious freedom. The teachings in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 teach that God expects Christians to submit to those in civil leadership over them, yet there will be

¹² J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 546.

¹³ David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 3.

differences of opinions among believers for how this should be accomplished. Some will readily advocate disobedience for a range of issues if they believe the government overstepped a limited function. Others advocate for a kind of removal from society in order to avoid this conflict while others push for a more moderate perspective between these views. In situations where there is potential conflict with the government, Acts 5:27-32 will be analyzed later in the dissertation as a biblical example of biblical disobedience to one's government to address this topic of righteous disobedience.

To combat the temptation to look at only a section of the Bible, one must approach the whole of Scripture as it relates to this issue of submitting to one's government. In the Old Testament, the lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah will be used to show how these servants of God maintained faithfulness to God while serving in nations that worshipped false gods. Their examples will show how they balanced the laws of their nations with a primary focus on maintaining a right relationship with God. Additionally, Exodus 1:17 will be used as an example of proper disobedience to ungodly laws. In this passage, the Israelite midwives refused to obey the order to kill the baby boys and are commended by God. Finally, Jeremiah 29:7 will be offered as an Old Testament example for how God's followers are told to "seek the welfare of the city" that God has placed them. All of these passage will show that the New Testament commands of submission to one's government were not new but established within the biblical narrative.

The New Testament provides three primary passages for this dissertation: Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17. These three passages each have explicit commands to obey and submit to one's government and are written by three different human authors. While there are many more biblical passages in both the Old and New Testament which

pertain to this topic, these select examples carry one through the narrative of Scripture and develop the theme of biblical submission. Some examples from church history indicate a willingness to focus on narrative books like Joshua and Judges, but these books will only be briefly examined to explain why they are not of primary relevance for this topic.¹⁴ These books fall into a different context as they relate primarily to Israel as a nation instead of showing examples of God's followers who were under foreign powers. In the New Testament, some have focused on sections like the Sermon on the Mount, yet this passage will only be briefly addressed in this dissertation to show that it pertains to a different issue other than formulating one's view of interactions with one's government.

Process to Establish the Foundational Principle

This dissertation will perform a brief survey that will reveal some of the major belief systems that taught Christians how to interact with their respective civil governments by focusing on what biblical passages were highlighted and how the people were instructed to regard their civil governments. Different church leaders will stress different biblical passages in response to their governments which will result in a wide variety of opinions and practices for the church. Some will promote the ideals in the Sermon on the Mount while others will look to Israel's example as a specially chosen kingdom for God. Practically, this will lead some groups of Christians to avoid involving themselves with the civil authorities while others will seek to exert influence over government in an attempt to conform earthly kingdoms to their understanding of God's future heavenly kingdom.

¹⁴ While not of primary importance for the topic, these passages do offer insight concerning how Israel as a people group and nation operated. However, Israel's function as a nation differs from how Christians are to live while in pagan nations. With this in mind, individuals such as Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah offer more direct information for Christians who live under secular governments.

To better gain an understanding of the heart of the issue, this dissertation will establish a brief overview of some of the major voices in the church during five different periods of time. These periods will include: the early church fathers, the Reformation, New England pastors during the time of the American Revolution, the German church during the rise of Adolf Hitler, and a few leading voices among modern conservative Christians in the United States. From this historical perspective, one will be able to see where major divisions among Christians stem from both a focus on different Bible passages as well as being influenced by the issues or their own times. Jonathan Haidt makes a connection of this issue of Christian involvement in society, though he labels it moral monism, as a major cause of division within a nation and within a church. This moral monism focuses on just one pet issue which becomes the sole focus of an individual or group.¹⁵ When this takes place on a larger scale within a nation, political parties can adapt their messaging to cater to that point. In turn, Christians can vote based on a party's acceptance or rejection of that moral monism regardless of the other important issues at play.¹⁶

This survey will inform this dissertation as to the methods used in determining a course of action which will glorify God. Each timeframe represents a different context, yet one can see traces of continuity between many of the individuals and groups. The similarities and differences will guide the discussion in such a way as to peel back the layers and find core truths about God's nature as it relates to submission to civil authorities. This historical survey will then connect each group or person back to how they dealt with disagreements between the church and the state based upon their focus in the past which caused them to respond to the government

¹⁵ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2013), 132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

in a certain way.¹⁷ During the historical survey, each person or time period will be analyzed to understand what the primary dividing line existed between obedience and disobedience. In other words, what caused past believers to reject some aspects of the government or its laws because of how that governmental action affected their theology or practice of their faith.

One of the primary reasons for the variety of opinions on how Christians are to relate to civil governments relates to differences in hermeneutical approach. After the survey of the five glimpses through church history, this dissertation will then analyze the hermeneutical systems employed and offer steps of interpretation to take that provide a consistent hermeneutic for the relevant passages on this topic. This will include a look into the differences on authorial intent, use of Old Testament narrative passages, application of the Sermon on the Mount, and the use of ὑποτάσσω.

This historical survey will also show how one's own cultural setting can influence one's approach to the Scriptures. Throughout church history, the civil situation often heavily influenced church leaders in how they instructed their flocks. To a large degree, this influence is unavoidable due to believers being engrained within their society. To combat this hindrance of being too close to the situation, believers benefit from the broader perspectives offered by church history. In the current situation in the United States, this cultural influence can be readily seen in what is commonly called the "black church" and the "white church" divide.¹⁸ This division in America's culture has led different people groups to emphasize different sections of the Bible and to understand the church's role in society in different ways. This divide can be harder to

¹⁷ For a different methodology for analyzing perspectives on this topic, see Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 20. This perspective does not focus on the differences between obedience and disobedience. Instead, Webber's focus highlights ways in which Christians generally view government leaders and actions.

¹⁸ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019), 4.

overcome if one is unwilling to look beyond the scope of one's own time and examine a broader range of history.

Along with this one example of divide in the United States, there is also the growing tension that exists between those who would identify themselves along either conservative or liberal political ideologies. Members in these camps can too easily view the other group in terms of just one aspect of their larger belief system, and from this narrow focus, they can attack the other group based on opposing views of family, economic system, view of oppression, or one of a number of other divisive issues.¹⁹ This type of divide can focus too much on what separates the groups instead of attempting to look into why the other group believes what they do.

With the benefit of looking into the church's past on this issue, one can learn lessons from history in order to better shape a hermeneutical approach which can be applied to all relevant passages instead of focusing in on just a few, select passages. With a consistent hermeneutic, one can then accumulate the knowledge from relevant passages in the Bible. Following the chapter on hermeneutics, this dissertation will exegete both Old and New Testament passages which provide instruction for believers who are under the civil authority of secular governments. As stated previously, only a handful of passages can be utilized in this dissertation, but the passages employed will be sufficient to get to the heart of the issue: submission to one's civil government as an act of submission to God. The character studies will reveal different men in different ages who remained true to the commands and nature of God while serving their civil governments to the best of their abilities. With the added passages from Exodus and Jeremiah, one can see that the focus is always on serving the Lord, though God also has the expectation for His followers to be the best temporary residents of their earthly homes.

¹⁹ Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York, NY: Sentinel, 2020), 132.

The New Testament will be used to understand Jesus' own teachings on how Christians are to live in this world based on Jesus' own teaching on taxes and on Paul and Peter's instruction in passages such as Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. This section will interact with the passages where specific instruction is given to believers as they faced hostile governments. In spite of having ungodly civil leaders, Christians were still called to submit to them as an act of submission to God.²⁰ There were only a few examples where the believers disobeyed the authorities, but this disobedience occurred in order to follow the clear commands of Jesus.²¹ The focus was not on creating social change but on transforming lives for Christ. Christians did cause change to happen within their spheres of influence, but this took place as individuals responded to the gospel, changed their own lives, and began interacting within society with a new purpose for God's glory.²²

The Old Testament passages provide many of the foundational principles concerning submission to one's civil government. After exegeting the Old Testament passages, the New Testament will continue the teaching begun in the Old Testament while building on top of this instruction with further teaching on godly submission. Exegesis of the Old and New Testament passages can then be connected and developed into a cohesive biblical theology of submission to secular civil governments. This biblical theology will show unity between the Old and New Testaments concerning God's expectations for His followers while they are under the authority of their governments.

²⁰ The reality of the Christian's call to represent God in a hostile environment is a familiar theme in Paul's writings. Ephesians 6:12 speaks of this battle while highlighting the truth that the battle is against the spiritual wickedness in the world and not against the people in the world. Christians should never be surprised when the spiritual wickedness of the world pushes against the ways of God. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 826.

²¹ See Acts 4:19-20 as one example.

²² See Acts 19:21-41 as one example.

This dissertation will show that the New Testament's call of complete submission based on God's nature is not a new concept, for it is based in the overarching priority of submitting to God in all areas of life. This starting point of submission to God is what enables believers to disobey a government's order if that order would prevent a command from God or compel an action which God has deemed sinful. Because of this priority of submission to God, Christians must maintain a life of holiness for the glory of God which then influences all other relationships, including one's relationship to the government, by submitting to laws and honoring officials. Christians are to promote the kingdom of God while in a world influenced heavily by Satan. This battle between God's people and ungodliness must be waged by Christians who are willing to stand up for the ways of God by promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of promoting God's kingdom must shape the political and civil involvement of every believer.²³

The final chapter and conclusion of this dissertation will connect the lessons learned from history, the proposed hermeneutics, and the historical theology based on exegesis into practical ways for the church to submit to civil authorities based on its ultimate submission to God. Specifically, this chapter will focus on Christians within the United States and how to apply the biblical instruction from the past into the modern situation dealing with these same issues. God's expectations for His followers are the same: to showcase complete submission to God which then entails submission to the civil government. While there are some situations which require disobedience if the government would command something which goes against God's nature or commands, the starting point for believers' interactions with the government is submission.

²³ Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 63.

Focus of this Dissertation

In the United States, most of the discussion for government revolves around the two political parties in power: the Republican and Democratic Parties. These parties, and other politically-focused groups in support of these parties, attempt to convince people that their platform is the moral choice, and this includes a focus by both parties to win over the Christian vote.²⁴ Messaging is constructed in such a way as to put the focus of a discussion on a topic which attacks the morals of the opposing party while highlighting their own superiority. This can most readily be seen in such hot topics as abortion or caring for immigrants.²⁵ In this battle for the Christian vote, too much focus is often placed on a lone issue without the necessary support needed to build a political position from a biblical perspective. While the current political issues are important for believers to understand, Christians must first establish the necessary order of importance for their focus. This must begin with a firm commitment to their own submission to God in all areas of life. God ordains civil authorities, and God has also promised His future kingdom where Christ will rule on earth. This trajectory of God's preeminence must be what guides Christians in their involvement and interactions within their culture and political parties.²⁶

With this in mind, this dissertation will not seek to address the political issues of the day but establish the important foundation of believers' primary submission to God as the sole source of ultimate authority and establish the necessity for nothing to negatively affect one's service to God. From this focus on submitting to God, Christians can then progress toward embracing submission to one's civil authorities as long as this submission does not fight against God's commands or nature. The goal is to adapt one's mind to the ways of God and use this adaptation

²⁴ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 156.

²⁵ Wilson-Hartgrove, *Revolution of Values*, 23.

²⁶ Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 65.

to God's ways to then influence the world for the glory of God.²⁷ Christians are to focus first on how to live within culture while submitting to authority for the goal of promoting Jesus Christ in all of their actions. The focus cannot be promoting one's nation or civil liberties, for all of life is to be for the glory of God and not for any earthly kingdom. The aim can also not be on trying to separate all areas of life into different spheres of influence with a hierarchy of submission. This type of division is not addressed within the Bible. The call to submit to one's government was stated simply to believers who lived under an ungodly government. Yes, their primary submission was to God, but this dissertation will argue that this submission should encompass all directives which do not cause a believer to sin or to be restricted in living out the commands of God.

Within the American setting, there are unique difficulties which can distract Christians. For example, pastors are legally permitted to preach on any issue, yet churches can face the loss of their tax-exempt status if there is a direct connection to a political figure, party, or issue.²⁸ There can also be the temptation to gloss over the "other" party's issues even if there might be some truth to part of their platform. Instead of finding common ground, Christians can be tempted to label the other side as too extreme while treating one's own views as almost equal with biblical truth.²⁹ Instead of this focus on promoting one's own ideals or the ideals of a particular party, believers must direct their efforts to bring all areas of their lives into submission to God, and this includes believers' interactions with their civil authorities. At the heart of this conversation is the issue of allegiance. To whom do Christians owe primary allegiance which

²⁷ Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2.

²⁸ Nina J. Crimm and Laurence H. Winer, *Politics, Taxes, and the Pulpit: Provocative First Amendment Conflicts* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5–7.

²⁹ Dreher, *Live Not by Lies*, 132.

governs all other actions? D. A. Carson argues that one of the primary distinctions which sets apart Christians is their heavenly citizenship. From this status as citizens of heaven, Christians are called to live within an earthly culture and nation while representing their service to God and revealing to others Jesus' control over them.³⁰

1 Peter 2:16 tells Christians to live within their freedom, but that living must be done in light of the reality that Christians are God's servants to serve His desires. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 that prayers are to be made for all people, including the civil leaders, in order "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." There are three goals here for Christians in these passages. First, Christians must seek to pray for all people with an emphasis on civil leaders. One of the goals in mind is to pray so that God's people will be unhindered in their pursuit of serving Him, and praying for the leaders goes along with both Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 in terms of properly respecting and honoring those in positions of authority.

Second, Christians should strive to live peacefully and quietly. While there may be times to make bold, public stands, the general state of life for Christians is to "lead a quiet and peaceable life" as they serve God (1 Timothy 2:2). Christians should be model citizens in all aspects of their lives as this is part of what submission entails. Finally, Christians must conform their lives to living as God desires them to live. As will be discussed later, a Christian's life could be countercultural if the culture is going against God. There will be lifestyle choices which run against the grain of society, and a government may seek to force Christians to change. This will cause conflict, and this is why it is vitally important to establish the basis for every Christian action as it relates to one's interactions with the civil authorities. Christians' choices should not

³⁰ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 166.

be based on what is socially acceptable or just part of tradition. Instead, Christians must establish a biblically based theology of civil and social involvement which can then be applied to every public interaction. All areas of a Christian's life are to be governed by God's Word and nature, and this includes using every resource to promote God's nature in life.³¹

Goals for this Dissertation

God has established human government, and God is the one who delegates His own authority to civil governments.³² Because of God's delegation, those who hold positions of civil leadership are to be honored as God's representatives. This does not mean that civil leaders are perfect or that every one of their actions is worthy of praise, but this does require Christians to conform their interactions with civil leaders and the laws of the land based on the reality that God is sovereign over all governments. Ultimately, submission to civil authorities is not based on their righteousness or goodness. Submission is based on the nature of God and His commands, and this is what permits Christians to righteously disobey unrighteous commands which go against God.

Christians do need to be a voice of moral authority to offer guidance and direction since those who do not know Jesus as Savior do not listen to God's instructions for how they are to lead. Especially in a changing world, Christians need to proclaim an authoritative, moral standard in spite of society's belief that morality is subjective.³³ As previously stated, Jesus has intentionally left His followers in this world with the purpose of being an example of the ways of God by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. To accomplish this, "the Christian church (which is His

³¹ Volf and McAnnally-Linz, *Public Faith in Action*, 7.

³² Wayne A. Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 87.

³³ Boot, *The Mission of God*, 79.

body) must be present to the world in the way in which Christ identified Himself with society. We are the instruments of His kingdom and witnesses to it.”³⁴ Christians must be the voice that carries the Word of God, for this is the only means by which society can truly begin reflecting the nature of God. However, Christians must be involved with society while submitting to those who are in positions of authority in order to affect change. While involved in society, the mission of the gospel is hindered when Christians proclaim their civil rights and neglect the priority of conforming all aspects of life to God’s call on their lives, especially when this causes Christians to pick and choose which laws they want to obey. However, the gospel of Christ is made evident in a greater way when Christians submit their rights and privileges and live in obedience to their authorities as long as that obedience would not go against the nature of God.

Practically speaking, Christians need to stand upon the firm foundation of a biblical theology of submission to civil authority before attempting to make sense of each particular issue. In the United States, Christians must look beyond each major party in American politics and promote God’s standard of holiness, purity, justice, and so on in culture. Christians should not be disengaged from society but seek to use the gospel to affect real, lasting change in one’s sphere of influence. For some, this will lead to them entering into the political arena. For others, the only direct political involvement will take place at the polls each year. However, each Christian, from the career politician to the voter and every one in between, must view themselves as submissive to God in every area of life, and this includes submission to one’s civil government in every way, except when such submission would cause a believer to sin. This submission is designed by God to enable His people to properly represent Him. Sometimes, this goal can seem too daunting or too impossible, yet of all people, Christians must remain positive

³⁴ Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 189.

that the gospel of Jesus can affect true, eternal change.³⁵ God's kingdom will come, so Christians need to be found faithful until the kingdom of God is realized.

³⁵ Moore, *Onward*, 214.

Historical Theology Survey

Introduction

The question of how to properly understand and apply biblical passages to one's interactions with the civil government did not suddenly appear to modern Christians. Instead, church history presents much information from past Christians which enables current believers to look back to see how their spiritual ancestors have dealt with this issue. By examining some small segments of church history, Christians will be able to see some of the major viewpoints used by Christians throughout the age of the church. The struggle within the modern church and its relationship with the civil government is nothing new as this debate has taken place repeatedly throughout church history.¹ This dip into the church's past will offer some valuable insight concerning past methodologies and conclusions, and these insights will then be able to aid the modern church in formulating a biblical theology of submission to God first and then to one's civil government.

At times throughout church history, Christian identity became synonymous with a political identity. This can be seen when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, but history will also reveal that this conjoined identity can make a negative impact on the church as political identity and power become esteemed idols of the church.² When Christian leaders attempt to become strongly identified with political ideologies, the spiritual distinctiveness of Christianity becomes lost within the political identity of the

¹ For example, Amy E. Black, ed., *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015) offers arguments for and against various modern camps for biblical thinking on the civil situations and shows that these same core beliefs are seen throughout church history.

² Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 8.

Christians. The various perspectives through church history offer current Christians the opportunity to learn both positive lessons and warnings of danger when believers have held to more extreme positions or used improper hermeneutics.

As to how the church is to interact with politics and the laws of the land, believers have taken positions everywhere from an attempt to remove themselves from society as much as possible, such as the Mennonites,³ to attempting to co-opt the civil leadership and force biblical standards on others using political methods, such as with prohibition in the United States.⁴ There have also been times where Christians have actively attempted to overthrow an established government as will be seen with John Knox. These differences stem from different biblical passages used as their focus for applying biblical submission.

This dissertation proposes that submission to one's civil authorities is ultimately submission to God and encompasses all directives of the civil authorities which do not explicitly go against God's commands or nature. Past examples of disobedience and confrontation will be used to show where past believers put the dividing line for submission based on their view of governmental intrusion on God's directives. Five periods of church history will be briefly analyzed in comparison to this proposal. This study will show how Christians in the past have formulated their own positions on the Christian's role with the civil government. After providing a survey for some of the prominent individuals within the time periods, their views will be assessed as to how they seek to resolve conflict between the church and state by focusing on what issue or issues would cause those believers to interact with the government in a different way. For example, a Christian theologian might teach others to be supportive of their

³ Thomas Heilke, "The Anabaptist (Separationist) View," in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, ed. Amy Black, Counterpoints Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 39.

⁴ Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity*, 95.

government by being involved in civil issues, running for office, or being employed by the government. However, that theologian may change and begin to teach Christians to avoid civil involvement if civil involvement would require believers to deny Jesus. The dividing line between involvement and isolation would then be the nature of worship of Jesus and affirming Jesus as God. Another example would entail a pastor speaking on the need to submit to the government unless governmental officials were corrupt. In this example, the dividing line would be the personal credibility of those holding office.

Through seeing which boundaries were elevated as critical in the past, one will be able to see the methodology used in previous generations to formulate a theology on Christians' interactions with their government. This historical survey, while brief, will be able to reveal patterns of thought and behavior which will then be able to inform the current context of Christians within the United States. Each time period in church history will offer some positive recommendations as well as reveal some mistakes to avoid.

The Early Church

Cultural Setting of the Church

After the time of the Apostles, the early church continued the fight to remain faithful to the calling of Jesus while in a world which was hostile to the faith. This hostility encompassed every aspect of life since the religion of the Roman Empire was integrated into all social interactions. In fact, any religion which opposed the religions of the Empire “was considered a threat to the safety of the Roman state,” and so the Roman authorities “saw Christians as those who were trying to set up a state within a state” due to their call for exclusive worship of God.⁵

⁵ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 87.

Cicero was clear in *Law from the Twelve Tables* when he stated, “Let no one have gods of his own, neither new ones nor strange ones, but only those instituted by the State.”⁶

During the first few hundred years of the church, believers were under the authority of Roman officials who had a responsibility to maintain the Roman Empire, and this included making sure that all people maintained the faith of the Empire. The call to honor all levels of civil authority in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 demands that Christians honor both the supreme authorities as well as the local government workers whose task was to root out all who were antagonistic towards the acceptable religions.⁷ Because of the pervasiveness of Roman worship and the abundance of Roman officials,⁸ the officials noticed when Christians refused to participate in public worship, whether big or small, and that refusal to worship false gods led to persecution.⁹ The believers during this time were not all in agreement concerning the best approach in submitting to the government, but they were united in the struggle while living as lights in a dark world under the constant threat of the Empire.

Tertullian of Carthage will be the first early church father to be used in this dissertation as he addressed some important aspects of applying submission to civil authorities in his writings. While some of his works seem to contradict one another on the topic of relating to the Roman Empire, these discrepancies could be due to either the difficulty of the topic as he related to specific issues or to his own positions changing slightly over time. These changes, or developments of his position, highlight the complexity of the pervasive worship incorporated

⁶ Cicero, *On the Laws II.19*.

⁷ Robin W Lovin, “Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (May 2016): 179.

⁸ Robert Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 78.

⁹ Petr Kitzler, “Christian Atheism, Political Disloyalty, and State Power in the Apologeticum: Some Aspects of Tertullian’s ‘Political Theology,’” *Vetera Christianorum* 46, no. 2 (2009): 245–46.

into the culture which would conflict with Christian living. Regardless of some of the changes in his writings, he offers a depth of information on how he believed Christians should interact with governmental authorities and duties.

Tertullian of Carthage

Tertullian was born in the late second century and ministered in Carthage. While he served the church as a writer on numerous topics, he wrote to Christians specifically concerning their relationship with the Roman Empire. In fact, some considered most of his work to have a political bent due to the immersion in the Roman culture and the ever present oversight of Rome.¹⁰ Because of his integration into the culture, his views concerning the role of Christians within the Roman society offer a glimpse into his own development concerning his priority of living for Jesus while maintaining a place within society. Tertullian saw the religious nature of the Roman culture and its dangers for Christians while guiding other Christians in their own pursuits of personal holiness.

In his work “Of the Crown,” Tertullian offers the example of a soldier who refused to wear a laurel crown due to the direct connection of that crown to worship of a god.¹¹ The soldier ended up standing trial for this refusal and was executed as a result of his stance. Tertullian addresses the situation with praise as he describes the soldier slowly taking off his armor and the burdens associated with service to Rome. In this discussion, Tertullian takes note of the complete integration of service to Rome and the inherent worship of false gods in that service, so the removing of the armor symbolized a rejection of that false worship since there was so much of the Roman soldier’s life which was part of the culture of worship towards the gods of the

¹⁰ Kitzler, “Christian Antheism, ” 245.

¹¹ Tertullian, *Of the Crown*, paragraph 1.

Empire. While admitting that there is a lack of direct command from Scripture for much of his teaching on the matter, he connects his teachings to tradition, custom, and faith as he wrote “for these and such like rule if thou requirest a law in the Scriptures, thou shalt find none. Tradition will be pleaded to thee as originating them, custom as confirming them, and faith as observing them.”¹² He stresses the necessity of living in such a way as to clearly direct all worship to God while taking a stand against false worship. He warns against civil service, because of the pervasiveness of false worship, and asks, “Do we believe that a human sacrament may supersede a Divine one, and that a man may pledge his faith to another lord after Christ?”¹³ After a series of other similar questions, he definitively states that “a Christian is no where any thing but a Christian,”¹⁴ and in this, he makes known his belief that Christians must avoid entangling themselves with other masters.

Because of the complete integration of Roman society and Roman worship, Tertullian warned against civil service since a godly Christian would have an almost impossible task in remaining true to the faith while serving a government immersed in false worship. This focus on one’s worship was Tertullian’s dividing line between a believer being involved in his or her society and the need to become more isolated from society. A Christian must never compromise one’s worship of God, so in his context, Tertullian focused on making sure that a believer could never be accused of worshipping a false god.

In his address to Scapula, he states that Christians, if living properly, should never be brought to judgment for immoral or unrighteous actions. Instead, “the Christian never has to suffer for any other affairs except those of his sect...it is for our singular innocence, our great

¹² Tertullian, *Of the Crown*, paragraph 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 11.

honesty, our justice, purity, and love of truth, yes, it is for the living God that we are burned to death.”¹⁵ In this, he echoes Peter’s words in 1 Peter 3:8-17 where he calls on Christians not to suffer punishment for doing evil. If Christians are living righteously, he tells the believers to not fear punishment for doing what is right. With this focus on 1 Peter, Tertullian advocates for righteous living as a testimony of one’s devotion to Christ. Righteous living must never be compromised whether through false, public worship as part of society or through embracing the culture’s standard of conduct. Instead, one must align one’s entire life to conform to God’s call for complete dedication to His ways.

In Tertullian’s mind, isolating from civil service was the best path to personal holiness. However, in Tertullian’s *Apology*, he argues, as he defends the historical background for Christianity, for the “constructive role of Christianity in and for Roman society.”¹⁶ His practical application for the Christian life should naturally lead to a life that is profitable to one’s society. Eric Osborn underscores Tertullian’s emphasis on the impact that Christians are able to make on a society by being a voice for justice and righteousness within their culture.¹⁷

Tertullian sees the necessity to progress in one’s own personal holiness, and if a government’s view of civil service includes acts of worship to false gods, Christians must serve the Lord instead of man. However, even in this call of isolation, Tertullian shows an emphasis on submission to the government as he does not wish to fight against the government but to operate biblically under Rome’s authority. In fact, Eric Osborn sees Tertullian’s writings on this topic as such that advocate for the reality that Christians should be innocent in all areas of life except for

¹⁵ Tertullian, *To Scapula*, paragraph 4.

¹⁶ Mark Burrows, “Christianity in the Roman Forum: Tertullian and the Apologetic Use of History,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988): 210.

¹⁷ Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 65.

opposition against false religions.¹⁸ Tertullian's views best serve the church in hostile civil governments which have incorporated a form of worship within their service whether through an outright religion or when forced to instruct others on a man-centric way of life.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria lived at the same time as Tertullian and was a major theologian for Christians of his day. He did not write extensively on the issue of Christians and the state, yet he did touch on the topic at times. In contrast to Tertullian's view, he did not view one's cultural setting as inherently opposed to God. However, he taught that lessons from culture must be tempered by both faith and knowledge.¹⁹ Clement sought for his students to glean what profitable lessons they could from their surrounding cultural interactions, but these lessons needed also to be placed against one's faith and knowledge that comes from God. This was Clement's focus as he then also wrote on the nature of civil government.

He viewed governmental laws as being in place to care for the people of the land and help mankind grow by "fanning into flame, as far as it can, what good there is in humanity."²⁰ While this may present a positive view of his own civil authorities and his perspective of the Roman Empire, he then quickly admits that there is only one perfect Lawgiver and Shepherd for the people. A legislator who follows God's directives for those who govern "not only announces what is good and noble, but understands it" by going to the Word of God as the ultimate source of what is good.²¹ He is not providing a commentary on actual human lawgivers, but he is addressing the standard by which to judge those who are in positions of authority. In other

¹⁸ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 67.

¹⁹ Clement, *The Benefit of Culture*, paragraph 3.

²⁰ Clement, *Moses Rightly Called a Divine Legislator*, paragraph 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 3.

words, Christians' outlook towards government should be positive since government is ordained by God and used by God for the good of society while also embracing the reality that humans will fall short of God's standard for rule, yet falling short of God's standards did not lead him to conclude that Christians should reject flawed leaders. Instead, believers needed to embrace the reality of God's standards for life and government as they lived within society.

One of Clement's most well-known students, Origen, takes up some aspects of this positive view of government as he calls for Christians to engage actively in prayer to remove the evil parts of their current civil institutions and to fight the spiritual battle for the good of all.²² Instead of directly serving one's government, Christians should focus on devoting themselves to spreading the teaching of the Bible. In fact, Origen taught that to neglect this aspect of spiritual service was to avoid one's proper civil responsibilities.²³ Clement taught a positive view of government since it was instituted by God. Origen seems to have continued this perspective as he called on Christians to serve their society through a focus on spiritual engagement for the sake of themselves and others.

Clement focuses on having faith in God's plan for society. Christians are to view the institution of civil government as designed by God even though fallible people are involved in government. The Mosaic Law is a large part of his focus in his instruction to other Christians as he calls for them to submit God's laws for them.²⁴ He adheres to a firm belief in God's reproofing work which can be administered in a variety of ways. Clement's emphasis was on embracing the godly origin of the governmental institution while understanding that sinful mankind will corrupt

²² James F Childress, "Moral Discourse about War in the Early Church," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (1984): 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ Clement, *The Law, Even in Correcting and Punishing, Aims at the Good of Men*, paragraphs 1-3.

God's design for government. Clement focused on individual representation within society while admonishing each Christian to confront wrong practices in society. With this focus, Clement's dividing line would be anything which would hinder a believer's ability to affect others for the cause of Jesus. Christians would have to reject the corrupt nature of those who would abuse God's institution of government by speaking out against that corruption. Christians are to live peacefully within society while contribution to society, but they are to actively be engaged with confronting unbiblical practices of those around them.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo came to the scene a century and a half after Tertullian and Clement, yet in many ways, Augustine followed many of the same lines of thinking as his predecessors concerning views on the state. However, his perspective was different from his predecessors due to Emperor Constantine's declaration of Christianity as the state religion. The combination of the state with Christianity affected the tight integration of the gods in society that previous Christians had to contend against by aligning service to the Empire who worshipped God.

Augustine readily acknowledges that God is the one who establishes all earthly rulers, both the good ones and the evil ones, and God rules over all earthly kingdoms as the Supreme King.²⁵ In spite of Rome welcoming Christianity, Augustine's writings came during a tumultuous time for the Roman Empire as Rome was drastically weakening. He wrote to offer instruction and encouragement in God who promises hope for Christians in the eternal future. Paul Weithman sees Augustine's teaching on this topic as focusing on the distinction that is revealed only when the end times occur. Before this happens, Christians and the unsaved live

²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 4.33.

intermingled within an earthly kingdom.²⁶ While on earth, believers still had to live within human kingdoms with all of their inconsistencies and false worship which permeated society. In spite of this, Christians are to live with a focus on God while still doing their part to serve their earthly nation.

For Christians' civil duties, he teaches, in Letter 91 to Nectarius, that "there is no boundary or limit to the good of caring for our country."²⁷ This can be done through living a morally upright life while caring for those in one's sphere of influence, yet Christians should also be actively engaging others in such a way as to make the society better because of their relationship with God. Within society, they were not to give into the false worship, which included both the Roman gods and the gods of the lands that Rome conquered, but bring others into proper worship of God.

Augustine sees no conflict of interest for Christians who wished to serve in the military. In fact, he draws comparisons to the active military life of David as illustration that God is not opposed to such a profession. Nevertheless, Augustine clarifies that Christians who fight must do so in such a way as to serve God.²⁸ Augustine's sense of God's supremacy was such that he did not worry about whether or not the actual conflict was righteous. To him, it was not necessary for the Christian to determine if the war was just because no cause of man could thwart God's plan, so the Christian just had to make sure to act in such a way as to please God with his own personal actions.²⁹ However, this is no easy task due to the complexities of life and service to a nation.

²⁶ Paul Weithman, "Augustine's Political Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. David Vincent Meconi and Elenore Stump (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 234.

²⁷ Augustine, *Letter 91 to Nectarius*.

²⁸ Augustine, *Letter 189 to Boniface*.

²⁹ Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichaeon*, XXII.73-79.

Augustine provided additional insights for Christians in leadership positions. Using the example of Jesus, he taught that Christians are to win others to the cause of Christ “by persuading and warning” and not by force.³⁰ Christians were not to win over others to the gospel by any means other than the ones by which Jesus taught the gospel. This position puts others at odds with Augustine in the centuries to come, yet this belief was birthed from his focus on God’s supreme authority and plan. If God is truly King of kings and totally sovereign, no one can impede God’s plan, and God’s plan of salvation is powerful enough to convict everyone. Because of this reality, Augustine was able to call believers to be engaged with their society and serve their governments. They were not to be like others around them in the sense that Christians must maintain their holy living for God’s glory, but they were to serve as the best citizens they could under the framework of God’s nature and commands. As Paul Weithman understands Augustine’s views, Christians within a government or the nation should not attempt to see signs of God’s favor or disfavor in the nation’s circumstances or events. Instead, Christians must stay focused on God’s sovereignty, with the reasons why events happen remaining a mystery, as they serve the Lord according to what God has revealed.³¹

Due to the change in social status for Christians, Augustine was able to promote more of a civil involvement for Christians as they sought to make a better society and Empire. Augustine focused on the need for Christians to be within society with the goal of representing Jesus to others. Because of this view and the more positive relationship between the church and the state, he was able to advocate for a high degree of involvement with civil positions and within society. Christians should serve in a godly manner for their personal lives, but they did not need to be

³⁰ Augustine, *On True Religion*, XVI.31.

³¹ Weithman, “Augustine’s Political Philosophy” in *The Cambridge Companion*, 244.

concerned about the decisions of the government. Instead, they were to be focused on the matters of God and their own eternal souls, but there should be a degree of involvement with the trends in society based on Augustine's writings as Charles Mathewes understands the impact of his views. Christians naturally evaluate what is happening around them, and this must include how the government operates. In this passive understanding of the culture around them, Christians must be constantly comparing the world's activities and philosophies against the teachings of the Bible, and when there is conflict between the two, believers must be a voice for God within that culture even if the civil authorities are pushing against God's ways. This should not be viewed as a rejection of that civil authority but as a properly applied example of what it means to live for Christ while in the world.³²

Augustine's emphasis was on living for the eternal kingdom while still within an earthly kingdom. This view holds in tension this future aspects of what is to come, yet Jesus is the one who has called His people to this task to represent Him. Paul Weithman understands Augustine's view of national events, such as barbarian invasions of Rome or even times of prosperity in the empire, not as a direct sign of God's favor or displeasure on the nation but as God's providence and sovereignty.³³ Believers should not attempt to understand the reasons behind God's sovereign actions but continue to trust in the kingship of God as they live their lives for God's glory while waiting for Jesus' return for the church. This separation between a nation's wellbeing and God's view of the nation lies within Augustine's view of the kingdom of God. Augustine scholar Charles Mathewes notes that Augustine's view of human government is a result of the fall and cannot be "a vehicle for building the kingdom of God on earth" as it is

³² Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 161.

³³ Weithman, "Augustine's Political Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion*, 244.

“nothing more than a remedial structure for securing some modicum of peace and relative justice in a fallen world.”³⁴ Christians should not be looking for some type of Christian nation on earth but must be focused on fulfilling God’s tasks for His followers while in the various nations of the world. Augustine’s dividing line is anything which would hinder a Christian from living in light of Jesus’ future kingdom. They are not to be fixated on this life or the kingdoms of this world but must be focused on representing Jesus’ future kingdom by being a voice for righteousness.

While these are not the only positions by the early church fathers, these positions represent some of the major schools of thought over the first several hundred years of the church. Christians often labored under an antagonist civil authority, and this affected the way in which they taught and understood passages. Emperor Constantine would change much of this dynamic with his embracing of Christianity. His choice would lead to the civil and religious authority embodied in the Roman Catholic Church which would hold a tight grip on power until the Reformation would come, and Christians had to again deal with some of these same questions on how to relate to civil authority.

The Reformers would have to also contend with a false church which held tremendous authority over the civil governments since the Roman Catholic Church had “misunderstood the nature of God’s righteousness and human sinfulness” which resulted in a battle “about soteriology and not specific corrupt practices.”³⁵ The core issue of the Reformation revolved around the nature of salvation as the Roman Catholic Church became more and more interested in governing this life instead of focusing on God’s future, eternal kingdom. Augustine’s focus on a believer’s true citizenship in heaven was set aside as the church grew in its focus on earthly

³⁴ Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace*, 202-203.

³⁵ Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 372.

kingdoms, and the Reformers were left with a multifaceted battle with the established church which included both core Christian doctrine and the relationship between the church and the state.

The Reformation

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was the trailblazing Reformer who galvanized European Christians in numerous ways and led to many changes in the church and in society. While Luther's ministry included much writing on several topics, only Luther's statements on the nature of Christians' interactions with civil governments will be analyzed. For Luther, the Roman Catholic Church and the civil authorities were intimately entwined with each other, so Luther had to confront Christianity's understanding of the role of civil government while he was also seeking to reform the church.

To begin, Lutheran doctrine teaches "that the Christian is simultaneously a citizen of two kingdoms" and "the Christian had to live within the tension" of this dual citizenship.³⁶ In a perfect world, this dual citizenship should not be a problem for Christians, yet Lutheran theology teaches about the corruption in this world due to sin, hence the tension Luther mentions that is in the world between Christians and the nature of the world. Luther recognized that God is the one who establishes all government, and the government represented one sphere of authority in life. Others would later develop this concept of spheres of authority, but Luther was a proponent of this concept. Heiko Oberman understands Luther's perspective as much more focused on seeing God's direct delegation of authority to civil leaders instead of focusing on what type of

³⁶ Wade R Johnston, "We Must Obey God Rather than Men: The Lutheran Legacy of Resistance," *Logia* 25, no. 3 (2016): 19.

government is being utilized, for the danger resides in the Satan's attempt to corrupt government instead of the form and function of that governmental system.³⁷ When the government follows God's teachings, this creates an additional blessing from God as the righteous can rejoice. When governmental leaders go astray, Christians must still submit to them, but Christians must also view God as the source of authority for governments and the one who holds those individuals accountable for how they lead.³⁸ When the government tries to dictate to Christians to live in a way that goes counter to godly standards, Oswald Beyer indicates that Luther believed this is where government authority ends and only God's authority remains.³⁹

Luther taught the need to follow God first, yet this comes with commands to submit to one's government as seen in Romans 13 and elsewhere. To Luther, it was never biblically right to rebel against God's established government, but there are times in which other, lesser civil leaders should resist the corruption of sinful leaders.⁴⁰ This is the viewpoint which would become known as the doctrine of the lesser magistrate. In other words, lower government leaders must only resist their overseers to correct wrongs, and this must be done without plans to break off from the nation or overthrow the leaders. Luther told the civil authorities, those who would listen to him, that they were responsible before God to counteract the emperor's sinful commands based on their religious convictions.⁴¹ In this way, Luther placed much more responsibility on the shoulders of the ruling elite than on the common people. According to Kenneth Latourette's

³⁷ Heiko Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. Ander Colin Gow (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 10.

³⁸ Kathryn A Kleinhans, "Good Government and the Vocation of Citizenship: A Lutheran Perspective," *Dialog* 57, no. 2 (June 2018): 121.

³⁹ Oswald Bayer, "Martin Luther (1483-1546)," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 62–63.

⁴⁰ Johnston, "We Must Obey God Rather than Men," 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

writing on Luther, Luther strongly denounced those who participated in the Peasant's War, for in his opinion, they were in rebellion against God's commands.⁴²

Luther played a balancing act between providing clear separation between God's kingdom and civil kingdoms, yet in the end, the political system of Europe at the time developed into a situation where one's belief became closely aligned with one's area and local leaders.⁴³ Luther needed the protection offered by his local leaders in order to save him from the Holy Roman Emperor and the Catholic Church. This necessity seems to have guided some of his teachings on the issue. At times, Luther reveals to have a soft spot for the peasants and others who would decry the atrocities of the ruling elite, but Luther eventually sided with the nobility as Luther needed political protection. Not all of Luther's close associates agreed with him on this, but Luther's teachings represent a large range of perspectives in his day.

Martin Luther focused on each person within society having a specific role to play concerning the church's interactions with the state. This divided field was his focus and led, in part, to his teachings to regular people, lesser magistrates, and the high authorities in the land. Each group must stay true to the Bible's call for personal holiness and service of God, but when one group failed in this task, he offered a tiered approach. Martin Luther represented a delicate balancing act between calling for believers to be submissive to their government based on Romans 13:1 and the actual duties of those in civil leadership in Romans 13:3-4. For the average Christian, Luther pushed for them to adapt to their civil circumstances while not antagonizing those in positions of leadership, but for those in civil leadership positions, Luther advocated a form of limited confrontation if the higher civil authorities were doing wrong. Luther justifies

⁴² Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of Christianity: Reformation To The Present*, Revised, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 725.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2:722.

some armed resistance if done by a lesser magistrate, but he only applied this option to a limited few.

Luther's dividing line was adherence to his understanding of the Bible. Even if commanded by the government, Luther held to the belief that the Bible superseded the government's authority. However, Luther's dividing line did not permit the individual citizen to rebel against the government, but it did permit lesser magistrates to militarily protect its citizens from greater authorities. Luther was willing to suffer at the hands of civil and religious authorities on the basis of adhering to biblical truths.

John Calvin

John Calvin faced a much different situation compared to Luther. Luther lived in an area where there was political upheaval, and many of the civil leaders had direct ties to Rome or wanted to directly oppose Rome. For Calvin, he was primarily focused on one city which did not experience the same issues which surrounded Luther. In fact, Calvin functioned within the framework of Geneva's ruling body in the shaping of the laws and disciplining of the people for some moral crimes.⁴⁴ He enjoyed a mostly stable relationship with the city's government, and this context shaped some of his practical theology especially when compared to Luther's situation.

John Calvin had a very high view of civil government and saw human rule as a small taste of the type of eternal kingdom which God will have in heaven.⁴⁵ Because of this view, Hall argues that Calvin believed and taught that some aspects of the eternal kingdom were already on

⁴⁴ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2:758.

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014), 756.

earth, but they were just not yet fully realized.⁴⁶ Because of Calvin's eschatological views, he retained a very positive outlook on civil government, especially when taking into consideration his relationship with his local government after his return to the city. However, this positive view of government did not keep Calvin from speaking against abuses committed by the nobility nor from attempting to keep them accountable to God's standard concerning how they were to govern. Jon Balsarak understands Calvin's rebukes of civil leaders as containing "some of the harshest language found in his corpus."⁴⁷ While acknowledging the civil authorities' right to rule, Calvin also believed that church leaders had the biblical responsibility to speak God's truth to every individual regardless of civil standing. This ability of church leaders to speak out against sins in society stems from Calvin's "conviction that he speaks with an authority which excels" the authority of kings and popes.⁴⁸

For those Christians who believed that one's government sometimes needs to be overthrown, he said, "we wish simply to stress that it is a cruel barbarity to want to reject it, for it is as necessary to men as bread, water, sun and air, and its value is so much greater."⁴⁹ His logic was based heavily on Old Testament passages as he saw the commands and examples from Israel's kingdom having a direct impact on nations. While he does use relevant New Testament passages, his foundational argument seems to have been based on seeing governments in his day in the same light as Israel's government. He even stated that Romans 12:8, a passage specifically addressing leadership in a church, can apply to civil authorities "since we know that civil

⁴⁶ David W Hall, "John Calvin on Human Government and the State," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 125.

⁴⁷ Jon Balsarak. *John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 757.

authority serves the same end.”⁵⁰ Ultimately, civil authority is rooted in God’s authority, based on Romans 13:1, and “it is a waste of time for private citizens who have no authority to determine public affairs to argue over the best form of government.”⁵¹ Basically, whatever government exists has been established by God, and there is no point in trying to change what God has established. Balsarak does note an exception to Calvin’s opposition to resistance against a government. Due to the interconnectedness of the pope’s influence and many civil authorities, particularly France’s government at this time, Calvin does advocate for resistance against the rampant idolatry in those governments because of their close connection to the false church in Rome.⁵² However, this line of thinking was primarily contained to what was happening in France and in Rome instead of being applied to every political struggle.

Civil rule and spiritual service were strongly interconnected in Calvin’s mind. He believed that Christians who served in civil government served in a noble, God-called profession, and Christians in government needed to rule based on their religious convictions. When it came to war, Calvin followed some of Augustine’s beliefs in that, while Augustine called for the Christians soldier to act righteously in war, Calvin extended that call to Christian leaders. They were to participate in conflict in a godly manner for the righteous reasons of punishing evil and defending the righteous.⁵³ Once again, Calvin heavily depended on Old Testament passages concerning God’s commands to kings and their duty to fight. When Christians are faced with a corrupt leader, Calvin did not advocate for armed conflict against that leader in most situations, for he believed that God should be the one who deposed the leader and

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 759.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 761.

⁵² Balsarak, *John Calvin*, 131-132.

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 764.

not the individual Christian.⁵⁴ War was for the God-ordained state to carry out and not for subordinate leaders or private citizens.

While acknowledging the flawed nature of the nations of men, he saw nations as a tool of God to be used for the purposes of God. With this in mind, Calvin's focus was on using whatever influence or power one is given by God to promote the ways of God. The dividing line was on theological positions which were different from Calvin's own conclusions. With this future outlook in mind, he adhered primarily to Christians controlling government and using laws to guide people in their spiritual lives. For those who were not in civil leadership, he taught them to submit to their government as it is from God. For those who were in spiritual positions, Calvin did strongly advocate for them to speak out against the civil leaders' sins and against ungodly leadership practices. Geneva would even use civil punishments for those who broke God's laws. Since pastors were God's spokesmen to speak the Bible to life, the church must commit to directly applying the Bible to every person including those who have been placed in positions of civil leadership by God. Governmental abuses should not cause Christians to rebellion against the government, but wickedness in the government must be the dividing line for Christians to speak against ungodly practices by those who had been appointed by God to lead the people.

Huldrych Zwingli

In Zurich, Huldrych Zwingli sought to institute societal change while using the laws of God with an intimately connected state and church.⁵⁵ With this model, the magistrates almost functioned as ministers as their duties included upholding moral and religious codes for all people. Zwingli followed in similar lines to both Luther and Calvin, but he sought to take the

⁵⁴ Hall, "John Calvin on Human Government and the State," 127.

⁵⁵ Gregory Miller. "Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531)," in *The Reformation Theologians*, 164–65.

close connection between the church and state several steps further. His goal was reformation of every level of society by legislating morality as Christian legislators and leaders guided the entire region in the ways of Christ. One of the most prominent biblical supports for this idea was the Sermon on the Mount which, in Zwingli's thinking, held high the call to love, to do justice, and to live righteously.⁵⁶

With this perspective, everything the state does is directly connected with God's commands. This requires civil leaders to be outstanding Christians who are governed by the Word of God. This moral and social change is to come about through both legislation and through personal commitment to affect others with the cause of Christ. However, the problem arose that not all agreed with Zwingli, especially other governments, yet Zwingli attempted to remain focused on the Sermon on the Mount while highlighting the "turn the other cheek" way of life. During his early years as an adult, W. Stephens notes that Zwingli saw, firsthand, the devastation and wanton destruction which resulted from armed conflict. While he was very patriotic towards his country, the brutality of war influenced him deeply to the point that he began developing his views towards conflict early in his life.⁵⁷ Because of this focus, he taught that "the gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, and Christians are not to defend themselves."⁵⁸ Because Christians are to turn the other cheek and the government leaders are to be Christians, the government should not be engaged in armed conflict. Zwingli took a concept of righteous war from the past but went far beyond that concept

⁵⁶ Walter Klaassen, "'Of Divine and Human Justice': The Early Swiss Brethren and Government," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 171.

⁵⁷ W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thoughts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 124-125.

⁵⁸ Klaassen, "The Early Swiss Brethren," 175.

to say that there were no just conflicts. While he died in battle, he died serving his flock as they went to fight and defend themselves.⁵⁹

Zwingli proposed this concept of righteous rule and living which would develop into a major belief system and lead others to practically abandon non-believing societal structures in order to live out this type of utopian state where Christians are ruled by Christians and live in peace. His emphasis was on living out the ideals of the Christian life and the future kingdom of God through use of governmental authority and power. Zwingli's practice was one of control over a civil government as well as isolation from the unsaved in order to create the Christian state in a similar way to the Old Testament picture of the nation of Israel. In fact, Stephens notes that the city council in Zurich played a vital role in promoting the Reformation in the city since "the bishops would not reform the church then the civil power... would have to do so."⁶⁰

For Zwingli, the role between the state and the church became obscure since he focused upon reforming God's people using both the church and the state. He bridged these two entities by demanding for "Christian councillors [sic] who accepted God's law and Christian preachers who expounded it."⁶¹ In Zwingli's teachings, both groups had the same mission of living out biblical truth in practical ways, so he sought to only have civil leaders who would align with this mission. Zwingli's dividing line was the ability to live out the Sermon on the Mount in a practical way. He sought to create a Christian utopia with the Sermon as the code of conduct. To this end, he would instruct Christians to band together in order to create this type of civil government. This desire to possess a Christian community directed his life even to the point of joining his congregation in their fight to preserve this type of community.

⁵⁹ Stephens, *Zwingli*, 123.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

John Knox

John Knox was a Scottish Reformer who saw, firsthand, the depth of depravity in his own government and in the church officials in his country. There was rampant lawlessness and moral failures in both institutions which seems to have played an important role in framing Knox's view of government and people's responses to such a government.⁶² In addition to the moral issues in the church and the government, Rosalind Marshall underscores the rampant wealth of the church that Knox would have seen while he was growing. The revenue of the church far exceeded that of the government, and most of the money raised did not help local people but helped support institutions in other parts of the world.⁶³ This stark contrast between the wealth of the church and the people who were not cared for by the church represents another factor which influenced Knox's way of thinking as he grew. The religious conflict of the country, Reformers versus Catholics, led to civil war and mass chaos which affect peoples' faith. Throughout this strife, Knox played a key role in directing the country according to his ideals of theology and government through publications like the *First Book of Discipline*, *Letter to the Commonalty*, and others.⁶⁴

Knox was militant in his attempt to root out corruption in both the church and the state. While government is established by God, he believed that some governments needed to be overthrown by the common people in order to stop the "false religion and the tyranny of the political and church leaders" which plagued Scotland.⁶⁵ Knox departed from Luther who believed that civil leaders alone had the right to resist higher powers who were doing wrong, and

⁶² Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 2:769.

⁶³ Rosalind Marshall, *John Knox* (Edinburgh, UK: Birlinn, 2000), 6.

⁶⁴ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 2:772.

⁶⁵ Mark J Larson, "John Knox, Tyranny, and Radical Resistance Theory," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 23 (2018): 79.

he went against Calvin who also viewed the local magistrate as retaining this responsibility to defend the people against an oppressive overlord. Instead, Knox taught that every citizen had the duty to take up arms against the oppressors. Knox's primary dividing line was the need to root out sinfulness in society. This line led him to fight against those who held power in order to better create a righteous society.

Since Scotland had gone so far in its rebellion against God, the people had to act as the magistrate to punish evil. In essence, he taught that when government failed in its duty to punish evil, as seen in Romans 13, the people had the responsibility to fulfill this role.⁶⁶ He depended heavily on the simplistic view of government responsibilities, as given by God, as seen in Romans 13:1-7. If these roles were not fulfilled, Knox believed the people no longer had to submit to the government. In many ways, his position on the limited role of government would lead others to create both a limited view of submission to one's government and the contractual view of government. Both of these positions will be analyzed later in this dissertation, yet their origin can be traced to Knox. Robert Healey summarizes Knox's view on this matter when he says that "no one is excused from personal obedience, which is to include all possible active commitment to reform the worship and behavior of one's nation."⁶⁷

This belief that citizens had this right to wage rebellion came from his view that there was little difference between the Old and New Testaments. As a modern prophet of God, he had the duty to guide the people out of the religious apostasy and into a state of pure worship.⁶⁸ Prophets had the right to bear the sword, and so he led the people to fight against those who

⁶⁶ Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 30.

⁶⁷ Robert Healey, "John Knox's 'History': A 'Compleat' Sermon on Christian Duty," *Church History* 61, no. 3 (September 1992), 322.

⁶⁸ Larson, "John Knox," 84–85.

would corrupt worship and corrupt God's purpose for government.⁶⁹ It was this way of thinking which would inspire many New England pastors to preach in the same way when the American Colonies were faced with a similar situation of an oppressive, wicked regime while they, in their own opinions, were trying to live righteous lives.

John Knox tied his Christian identity to his own cultural identity which he sought to forcibly change through armed conflict in his home country. His focus and the dividing line between submission and armed rebellion against the government consisted of the righteousness of those in authority. Those who only spoke against abuses did not go far enough in rooting out evil. If those in leadership positions, both in the state or the established church, were unrighteous then they had to be opposed and removed. Knox easily falls into the category of Christians confronting government in a forcible way, and once the previous government is overthrown, Knox advocated for the church to control the new government. He focused on the need for cleansing society from sin even if that meant overthrowing a government established by God,⁷⁰ for Knox held the need for purity above the teaching to submit to one's leadership if that leadership failed to act in a righteous way.

New England Pastors During the American Revolution

The American Revolution represented a time when the pulpit revealed itself to have a depth of influence in the realm of politics. C. H. Van Tyne, who studied the influence of the New England pulpit, stated, "In the days of the New England's foundation, political leadership as well as moral guidance was beyond question with the clergy, and only the commandments of God

⁶⁹ Dawson, *John Knox*, 32.

⁷⁰ Healey, "John Knox's 'History,'" 322-323.

took precedence over their teachings.”⁷¹ This level of influence often permitted pastors to speak beyond the confines of the Bible and offer their own take on situations, and this included the political realm. One of the more influential pastors who guided others’ thinking leading to the American Revolution was Jonathan Mayhew.⁷² While he had written on and preaching concerning political liberty early, much of his confrontation with British influence stemmed from Thomas Secker becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury and his push for greater Anglican involvement in the American colonies.⁷³ This elevation of Secker and his subsequent push for greater involvement in the colonies caused Mayhew to push harder against British control and oversight. According to James Bell, Mayhew believed that the Anglican church would eventually create a Bishop of the colonies which would lead to less religious and political freedom for those in America.⁷⁴

Preceding Secker’s appointment but providing the foundation for later preaching and writing, Jonathan Mayhew published, in 1750, “A Discourse Concerning the Unlimited Submission and Non-resistance to the High Powers.” In this discourse, he taught a requirement for those in governmental positions to adhere to a strict prescription for their actions and laws or else they no longer operated as ministers for God but as the devil’s ministers. If this occurred, Christians no longer had to submit to their leadership.⁷⁵ He saw the biblical instruction concerning submission to the government as conditional based on governmental leaders’ actions

⁷¹ C. H. Van Tyne, “Influence of the Clergy, and of Religious and Sectarian Forces, on the American Revolution,” *The American Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (1913): 54.

⁷² J. Patrick Mullins, *Father of Liberty: Jonathan Mayhew and the Principles of the American Revolution* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 44.

⁷³ James Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 67.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Mayhew, “A Discourse Concerning the Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the High Powers,” *Founding.com*, March 21, 2008, paragraphs 1-2.

in light of a narrow view for the purpose of government. Jonathan Mayhew influenced many other pastors in their own thinking as they analyzed the actions of the British crown leading up to the American Revolution. In his address concerning the place for Romans 13:1-7 in their situation with Great Britain, Howard Lubert observes that Mayhew purposefully advocates for a non-literal interpretation of this passage, and instead of the passage proclaiming God's desire for Christians to submit to the state, Mayhew argues for the passage to teach that "God requires resistance to tyranny, since God's laws bind all men, including rulers."⁷⁶

As a prominent voice in New England churches, Mayhew's sermons and hermeneutics influenced many of the church leaders around him as well as the individual people as tensions with England continued to rise leading up to the American Revolution. His positions led to many Christians viewing the government as possessing limited authority, and hence limiting one's need to submit to the government, and viewing the relationship between those who govern and the governed as a form of contract. If those in leadership did not adhere to the contract, the governed did not have to submit.

Patricia Bonomi highlights another factor which easily led to the pulpit being used to push against British authority. She connects the fact that "a majority of Americans [during the time leading up to the American Revolution] were Dissenters," so the people were already accustomed to pushing against Anglicanism and the crown's authority for their beliefs.⁷⁷ The major religious groups in New England had already pushed against one aspect of British influence, and when the crown attempted to push some new taxes on the colonies, the people

⁷⁶ Howard Lubert, "Jonathan Mayhew: Conservative Revolutionary," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2011), 594.

⁷⁷ Patricia Bonomi, "Religious Dissent and the Case for American Exceptionalism" in *Religion in a Revolutionary Age*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 33.

were already prepared to push against this form of British authority. J. Patrick Mullins follows the train of thought from Mayhew to the people who connected past British armed resistance against erring kings to their own situation, and so the historical connection provided the right to fight against the king due to his own wickedness and abuse of power.⁷⁸

Of course, there were other influences that guided the war effort and other locations in the colonies where preaching was important. However, New England was the center for the start of armed conflict against Great Britain, and the pulpit was at center stage for its influence in galvanizing the people to rebellion. For this reason, the influence of pastors in their preaching and writing reveals this continued line of Christians' attempts to understand how believers should be interacting with their civil authorities. There was a small minority of pastors preaching for peace and preaching while supporting their English king, but the vast majority of churches in New England proclaimed the need to separate from their overlords across the ocean. Many in the colonies began connecting their political struggle to a spiritual battle taking place between the antichrist, Great Britain, and the people of God, the colonists. Like Knox, the political struggle against the British crown began to be painted as a battle for a land defined by Christian principles and freedom instead about who had a right to govern.⁷⁹

Those few religious scholars who were not supportive of an armed conflict turned to the same biblical source as Zwingli, the Sermon on the Mount.⁸⁰ Jesus' own teachings, in addition to other related passages which taught on submission, were used to try to quell the war vigor that was taking root in the colonies. In general, Christians in New England believed that the Bible

⁷⁸ Mullins, *Father of Liberty*, 58.

⁷⁹ Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010), 33.

⁸⁰ James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

spoke to all issues of life including how Christians should conduct themselves in politics.⁸¹ They also believed that God is the one who ordained all authority. However, New England pastors had been laying the foundation for undermining the authority of those with whom they did not agree. They taught that tyranny must be opposed based on a belief in a sort of social contract between those who rule and the ruled. If those in power break that contract, the rulers lose the right to rule.⁸² It was this concept that was rooted in the minds of New England Christians and permitted them to actively rebel against England.

This concept is very similar to Knox's focus on removing corruption and false religion. In this way, the battle was not just focused on taxes or freedoms but was based on the desire for religious purity as righteous rebels deposed those who were ruling in sin. Most of the British authorities who were in the Colonies were Anglican, so their removal meant a removal of a false religion, freeing those who were true to the Bible to take their places and rule as God had intended for governments to function.⁸³ To New England patriots, the American Revolution could not be separated into either a religious conflict or a political conflict. Instead, the people believed in the pastors who united the spiritual and political conflict into one. Additionally, Thomas Kidd notes the "religious individualism" which came from the Great Awakening led to the practice of each individual person deciding on the validity of the British government's decisions and each person's right to decide whether or not to obey controversial laws.⁸⁴

The pastors' biblical support for this came from the wars of the Old Testament. The patriots in New England saw themselves as modern Israelites who were fighting to remove those

⁸¹ Alice Mary Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (London, UK: Forgotten Books, 2018), 13.

⁸² Byrd, *Sacred Scripture*, 10–11.

⁸³ Van Tyne, "Influence of the Clergy," 47.

⁸⁴ Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 77.

corrupted by sin so that they could set up a country for God.⁸⁵ One pastor, Jacob Duche, used Galatians 5:1, “stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” in a sermon to rally men to fight. In the sermon, he made the connection from Paul’s statement to their current situation as they attempted to fight for freedom from England, for to serve under the oppression of England was to serve under the spirits of darkness. He preached that “true government can have no other foundation than common consent” even though this application missed Paul’s purpose in Galatians.⁸⁶ Pastors like Duche followed in the tradition of preachers in New England and preached with great authority on every topic even if they did not have clear teaching from the Bible to support it. They viewed themselves as God’s righteous warriors against the sinful spiritual powers of this world, and they convinced their parishioners of this concept. They gloried in Exodus 15:3, “The Lord is a man of war,” and “colonial ministers could not quote this verse often enough” in their sermons.⁸⁷ They sought to add fuel to the fire of independence, and “colonial ministers did not shy away from biblical violence. They embraced it, almost celebrated it, even in its most graphic forms.”⁸⁸

New England pastors were able to skirt around Romans 13:1, and other verses, by nullifying Britain’s authority due to the rationale of men like John Knox and John Locke. Some New England pastors studied the philosophy of John Locke, an influential English philosopher who spoke on the nature of society and people’s rights, as they created their own political and social philosophies. Because of this connection to Knox and Locke, Byrd indicates that the

⁸⁵ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture*, 8.

⁸⁶ Jacob Duche, “The Duty of Standing Fast in our Liberties,” in Frank Moore, *Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*, (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), section 2 paragraph 7.

⁸⁷ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture*, 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

pastors truly believed that “where executive and legislative authority exceed the bounds of the law of God and the constitution, then their acts are *ipso facto* void.”⁸⁹ They used popular philosophies of their day to then adapt their preaching to secure political freedom in order to then mold the state that was to come. New England gloried in the type of church-state relationship that Knox proclaimed. They desired to root out evil, but they sought to do this by adapting their call of ministry to meet their political desires. With this focus on Israel’s invasion of Canaan, these pastors taught the American colonists that they needed to forcibly remove the ungodly influence of England in order for America to be a righteous nation. They tied the righteous battle to their cultural identity to establish themselves as separate from England, and the battle that they faced for political independence also became one of righteous sacrifice.

The New England pastors preached strongly for the need to confront an errant civil government as, according to their opinions, Great Britain no longer fulfilled its role to govern in a biblical manner. This was the pastors’ dividing line. Since the British government was not ruling according to the pastors’ biblical view of government, the British had voided their right to rule and must be opposed. Because of the crown’s failure to govern rightly, the pastors preached that the people had the right to enter into an armed conflict with the unrighteous rulers. Righteous rule represented the dividing line between submission and rejection of that government. If a government conformed to the idea of a mutual contract between the rulers and the people, they would submit. If the government acted in such a way that the people felt hindered in life, they advocated disobedience. In many ways, the struggle which took place in New England was a glimpse of what was to come in the church in Germany before the start of World War 2.

⁸⁹ Baldwin, *The New England Clergy*, 101.

German Christians During World War 2

The situation in German churches leading up to and during World War 2 encompasses numerous issues and stances by a large variety of individuals, church organizations, and church statements. Individuals such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer played key roles in their attempts to stop the influence of Hitler and maintain a church which was focused on God's glory and mission. Overall, these and others like them failed as the vast majority of Christians in Germany embraced the Nazi party and its belief system. Most of the German Christians still followed much of Martin Luther's teachings especially as his teaching related to the church and state which is one reason why many Christians followed the new political leader. Teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, Luther taught that each individual Christian's focus needed to be on service towards his or her neighbors,⁹⁰ and the lesser magistrates were to concern themselves with the workings of the federal state.

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Renate Wind notes his focus on taking the Sermon on the Mount in a direct fashion. For Bonhoeffer, this sermon pushed him onto the path of "non-violent resistance" as he sought to apply Jesus' words to his circumstances.⁹¹ Not all German church leaders would take this same pathway, and even Bonhoeffer would eventually take a more active approach in resisting Hitler, yet some German church leaders attempted to resist the direction of the country without violence as much as possible primarily due to passages such as the Sermon on the Mount.

⁹⁰ Theodore J Hopkins, "Luther and Bonhoeffer on the Sermon on the Mount: Similar Tasks, Different Tools," *Concordia Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 38–39.

⁹¹ Renate Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel*, trans. John Bowden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 96.

The church in Germany was “a state church, with the state continuing to collect the church tax and continuing to pay the bills.”⁹² This unity of church and state, as instituted by Martin Luther’s view that those who served the church and the state were intimately connected,⁹³ played a key role as many church leaders seemed to go out of their way to continue to make the state, and Hitler, happy in their submission to the state’s doctrine. In Hitler’s rise to power, he attempted to incorporate Christian terms to bring that large segment of the German populace over to his cause, and the church was not immune to Hitler’s charismatic nature.⁹⁴ Through the church struggles in Germany, the majority of church officials had no major issues with the Nazi party’s stances, and this included its antisemitic stance. Eventually, the church officials called for all ministers, who were also viewed as civil servants, to take an oath of allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi party as the leaders of Germany. Those who failed to do so would be stripped of their positions in the church.⁹⁵

This oath and numerous other issues before and after this event caused some to stand in opposition to the state. One example of this opposition is the Barmen Declaration of Faith which took a stance against the theological corruption initiated by the Nazi party, though the Barmen Declaration stopped short of naming specific names or practices.⁹⁶ Even though this was a significant document, the wording was watered down to keep from offending the Nazi party too

⁹² Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 25.

⁹³ Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, Stanford University, accessed June 11, 2022, <https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Luther-ChristianNobility.pdf>, “The Three Walls of the Romanists,” paragraph 8.

⁹⁴ Dean G. Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁶ Michael S. Haggard, *Pastors Against Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Church Struggle in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: 5 Fold Media, 2018), 81.

much by removing any direct reference to those in the Nazi party or addressing the issue of Jewish treatment. This document followed the teaching of Barth as he continued to lecture and oppose what was happening in Germany in his own way. This document supported the need for the Scriptures to stand above the authority of the state, and the church needed to remain faithful in its calling.⁹⁷

Most of the opposition to Hitler by believers came in the way of publications. This included a letter in 1936 to Hitler decrying many of his actions. It also included an attack against specific teachings which were coming from the Nazi camp.⁹⁸ Some of the pastors incorporated into their sermons specific mention of Germany's wrong actions. This included Bonhoeffer who would continue to preach against the oppression which was taking place.⁹⁹ These publications and sermons were done in such a way as to highlight the errors of society while also mainly abiding to the laws of Germany. While many Christian leaders in Germany embraced the fervor which took hold of the country, a minority took up the call to denounce the sin which was surrounding them. Bonhoeffer called for German Christians to live a costly life of discipleship to God. His model was the Sermon on the Mount which stood in stark opposition to Germany at that time. People's rights were being trampled by the state, and many Christians were passive towards this oppression, due to their strong commitment to nationalism, instead of living based on Jesus' example.¹⁰⁰

For the most part, there was not a call for an armed rebellion against the Nazi party even though this party was committing atrocities in Germany. The state's control over the church,

⁹⁷ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 40–41.

⁹⁸ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 106–7.

⁹⁹ Haggard, *Pastors Against Hitler*, 69.

¹⁰⁰ Hopkins, "Luther and Bonhoeffer on the Sermon on the Mount," 47.

though technically indirect for most of the time, could be seen through a sermon given to pastors who would sign the oath. This sermon was written to help convince the broader Christian community of the need for the oath and that those who refused to sign it were in obvious sin. This sermon was provided to the pastors at a time when many “dissenting pastors” had been forcibly removed from their congregations, yet the church’s were to still give thanks and move beyond the contention which was ripe in the church.¹⁰¹

Bonhoeffer wrestled with the principles in Scripture which called for submission to one’s government, for he saw the great tragedies unfold around him as Hitler grew in his boldness and cruelty through the years. He knew he could not fight for his country as the war seemed immoral to him. He did everything he could do to dodge the required draft, and he was successful in this act of resistance against Hitler’s Germany in his own life. At the start, his dividing line was adherence to the Sermon on the Mount. This focus caused him to avoid active support of Hitler. However, Bonhoeffer’s hesitation to take an active role in overthrowing his government changed due to the level of suffering around him. Renate Wind sees the moment of decision when Bonhoeffer was confronted by the question of what would be the greater guilt: “that of tolerating the Hitler dictatorship or that of removing it.”¹⁰² He wrote, “the church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community.”¹⁰³

Bonhoeffer saw Hitler destroying so much life along with the church in Germany, and this was too much for him. He decided he could not stay passive in action while watching this complete destruction happen to those he loved and cared for, so he entered a plot to assassinate

¹⁰¹ “A Sermon about the Loyalty Oath to Adolf Hitler,” in Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow*, 180–86.

¹⁰² Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 144.

¹⁰³ Haggard, *Pastors Against Hitler*, 98.

Hitler and end this oppression. Hitler's actions caused Bonhoeffer to feel the need to act in order to save others. While his original dividing line was adherence to the Sermon on the Mount, the depth of suffering around him caused him to adapt his dividing line. Now, the extreme loss of life and corruption of God's followers at the hands of those in political authority led him to act to remove Hitler from power. He did not seek to set himself as the civil leader, but he sought to act in such a way as to permit right worship again by removing the corrupting influence of Hitler and his political party. He could not be silent anymore as he saw the wanton death and destruction around him. Renate Wind sees Bonhoeffer's belief in God and His nature as being "bound up with the struggle against injustice."¹⁰⁴ He found himself surrounded by those who committed constant injustices against helpless people. In his mind, this required him to work to overthrow Hitler.

By and large, the church in Germany succumbed to the Nazis in their theology and practice as the popularity of Hitler swept the country. However, there were a few who stood up against the corruption of theology in the function of the church and the oath of allegiance for ministers. The majority of opposition occurred within the function of their responsibilities as ministers of the gospel through publications and preaching. This type of resistance was used within their current laws to provide a voice for God's Word. Even though the state and church were connected, the focus was on the church's internal message and mission. Eventually, this was not enough as some Christian leaders saw the cheapness of human life around them and the breakdown of the church in its purpose. To them, the call to submit to the state ended when their inaction would have led to more suffering and a further dishonoring of the name of Jesus, for they viewed their service to God as a higher calling than their submission to their government.

¹⁰⁴ Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 180.

Modern Political Views in Conservative Evangelicalism in the United States

The United States has often seen contentious political battles as each side seeks to promote its own ideologies. Along with the general population, Christians have joined in the national debate over the prominent issues of the day. Each election cycle sees politicians vying for the Christian vote. Of course, Christians do not vote as a bloc, but politicians attempt to draw in the religious crowds by highlighting important issues such as public justice, helping the poor, and the lives of the unborn. Many of these issues divided Christians to one political side or the other, so politicians were able to generally speak to large blocs of Christians based on the important topics.

While there has been a tremendous amount of discussion in the evangelical church concerning the church's involvement in the political arena, the focus here will be more on political developments within conservative evangelicals circles. However, even this niche group of Christians will represent most of the broad spectrum of Christian political theory that has been seen throughout church history. Of the individuals used in this survey, none are advocating armed rebellion against the state or taking control of the state, although that call is growing among the politically far right Christians.

While the debate in the United States concerning the government's closure of churches or restrictions on worship service does not yet have the benefit of time to analyze the situation, this debate between individuals such as John MacArthur and Jonathan Leeman represent the continued church struggle as Christians seek to apply the biblical call to submit to civil leaders. They will continue to operate under views such as sphere authority as represented by Martin Luther and a contractual view which limits the government's use of biblical authority as represented by John Knox.

John MacArthur

John MacArthur, a prominent pastor in California, has often written on the issue of Christians' interactions with civil government. In his commentary on Romans, MacArthur declares that the American Revolution was rebellion against God's commands in Scripture and that "the United States was born out of violation of Scripture."¹⁰⁵ Instead of promoting rebellion against God's established government, MacArthur states, in his commentary on 1 Peter, that Christians must have "proper respect for and humble submission to all the legitimate institutions of human authority."¹⁰⁶ By focusing on the legitimacy of the government's actions, MacArthur is following the path established by Knox in that the government should only operate within a small set of explicit biblical instruction, so any command outside of that limited window of authority is illegitimate and does not need to be obeyed. To prove his point, MacArthur has focused on some political leaders' motives and the validity of the facts used by the government.

On top of his call to submit humbly to one's governmental authorities, he has also called for Christians not to place political or social activism as their priority. In his opinion, "by looking to human means to reform society and establish Christian values, we've denigrated God's sovereignty over human history and events."¹⁰⁷ When Christians as a bloc try to engage in their country politically, he believes that Christianity becomes too closely tied to a particular political movement and loses its focus on promoting the gospel of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ His focus is on maintaining the central issue of the gospel even if that means that not utilizing some of the means available to enact political change in America. In his opinion from these writings, political activism and

¹⁰⁵ John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, MNTC (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994), 207.

¹⁰⁶ John MacArthur, *1 Peter*, MNTC (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 143.

¹⁰⁷ John F. MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), viii.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

gospel centrality are two mutually exclusive activities, for the political activism would distract too much from the believer's primary role of gospel living.

Instead of promoting civil unrest or speaking loudly against political viewpoints with which they disagree, MacArthur and his ministry promotes calm, quiet submission that upholds the uniqueness of Christ's redemptive work in believers. Writing on behalf of MacArthur's ministry, Jeremiah Johnson writes, "divided priorities, political motivations, and aggression toward authority all invite the wrong kind of attention and scrutiny for God's people." Instead, Christians must live in quiet submission so that "through our good behavior and submission to authority, we can silence those who oppose God's Word and His people."¹⁰⁹

When the state of California began implementing regulations for its populace due to the spread of COVID-19, MacArthur and his church were faced with the choice to either submit to the government or resist its instructions to the church. MacArthur and his fellow leaders at Grace Community Church openly published their thought process when they opened up Grace Community Church back to its regular service. The church stated that the government has no right to dictate how or when they worship as a church since the church and the state govern two different spheres of life.¹¹⁰ This type of reasoning harkens back to the Reformers who divided aspects of life into different spheres of control with the state and the church. They recognize the authority of the state as arising from God, but they believed that the state overstepped their bounds when attempting to dictate how they function as a church. This follows MacArthur's foreword in *Just Thinking: About the State* where he wrote, "a Christian's obedience to Caesar's

¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah Johnson, "Fear God, Honor the King," *Grace to You* (blog), November 7, 2016, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161107/fear-god-honor-the-king>.

¹¹⁰ John MacArthur, "Facing COVID-19 Without Fear," *Grace to You* (blog), September 21, 2021, <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/2254>, "A Short History," paragraph 6.

legitimate [emphasis mine] power is nevertheless a divine mandate.”¹¹¹ MacArthur would describe the state’s action towards his church as not legitimate and would state that believers do not need to follow illegitimate commands.

John MacArthur has written a lengthy blog post on his website concerning his reasons for why he believes church must still meet in spite of restrictions given by various governmental bodies, yet he does not stop just at the need for meeting as a local assembly of believers but seems to indicate that any restriction or guidance on how the church meets is also governmental overstepping off the government’s God-ordained sphere of influence.¹¹² However, MacArthur’s first several reasons for keeping the church opened consists of arguments against the severity of COVID-19, attacks on the truthfulness of Dr. Fauci and the media, and potential coverups by major institutions. This line of argumentation is attacking the validity of the government’s view of the virus instead of addressing the fundamental issue of when believers have the responsibility to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Because of MacArthur’s view of the prominence of the government’s lies, he advocates for Christians to rise up against the lies and proclaim the truth about what is happening in the United States.¹¹³ However, this would go against what he has stated in his commentaries on Christians’ interactions with the government and the need to keep the gospel prominent.

John MacArthur offers a viewpoint that focuses on Romans 13:1-7, but he also heavily leans on Acts 5:29. In this passage, Peter boldly proclaims, “we must obey God rather than men” when the believers were told not to proclaim the gospel. This verse shows a priority for God’s

¹¹¹ John MacArthur, “Foreword” in Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker, *Just Thinking about the State* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021), xiii.

¹¹² John MacArthur, “Christ, not Caesar, Is Head of the Church,” *Grace to You* (blog), December 28, 2021, <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/1988>, paragraph 4.

¹¹³ MacArthur, “Facing COVID-19 Without Fear,” “How Should the Church Respond,” paragraph 5.

commands over the commands of civil authorities, and MacArthur puts a great emphasis on this priority. His dividing line is that the church must be permitted to make its own decisions in practice and in theology. According to MacArthur, to interfere with the church in any way is for the civil authorities to overstep their boundaries which should cause the church to actively speak against the encroachment of the state as he views both theological positions and how the church functions in a similar light.

MacArthur pushes for Christians to focus on their task to serve the Lord and to do so away from governmental interference as much as possible. A major difference between the historical context for his positions in his commentaries and his responses to the government's regulations for the virus could be his own involvement of his church in dealing with potential government overreach. MacArthur's changing views highlight the difficulty involved in offering a consistent approach on submission to one's government without adapting it based on changing circumstances.

Jonathan Leeman

Jonathan Leeman, who is the editorial director for 9Marks ministry, believes that Christians need to look beyond partisan lines and need "to rethink faith and politics from a biblical perspective."¹¹⁴ To enact change in society, Christians must first be concerned with solid, biblical teaching which impacts each individual's life in such a way that the church's teaching overflows from the Christian into the community.¹¹⁵ There is emphasis on the reality that all of life, including the various political theories, is an act of worship to either God or an idol. Because

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018), 9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

of this, Christians must actively live in worship to God in the public sphere of life. Leeman would agree with MacArthur that the government cannot change the hearts of people. Instead, the government should respond to the actions of individuals by punishing evil actions and enabling right actions.¹¹⁶ It is the work of Christians living out the gospel which can enact lasting change as people give themselves over to God.

Leeman also believes the authority of the state is derived from God, though he sees the current situation in America differently from MacArthur. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman published a response to his position.¹¹⁷ In this rebuttal, they state that churches have full freedom to adapt their service to meet the requirements of the state, and this should be seen in the same spirit as “state-established fire codes, building codes, zoning restrictions” and so on. The government does have a responsibility to provide the safe regulation of activities, and these safety protocols should not be viewed as the state’s attempt to change the theology of the church. Also, in their opinion, some of MacArthur’s arguments seem to be based on his assessment of COVID-19 as something that is not a serious threat to public health. Dever and Leeman argue that judgment calls for public safety are not part of the church’s jurisdiction.

These two men uphold the authority of the state as derived from God, and they firmly believe that the state should not dictate church practice. However, they point out that there is overlap between the spheres of church and state. There are times in which the church must stand for truth, as seen in the house churches in China, but restrictions which are implemented due to a pandemic should not be viewed as an attack on Christ but as a government which is seeking to

¹¹⁶ Leeman, *How the Nations Rage*, 53.

¹¹⁷ The following information is based upon Jonathan Leeman and Mark Dever, “A Time for Civil Disobedience? A Response to Grace Community Church’s Elders,” 9Marks (blog), July 25, 2020, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-time-for-civil-disobedience-a-response-to-john-macarthur/>.

help protect its citizens. God has not given civil governments complete authority over all realms of life. Instead, civil government's authority is relative and limited as it is derived from God's authority.¹¹⁸ Leeman emphasizes the need to submit to the government's restrictions when it has "a *reasonable* [emphasis original] argument" and if the government does not "single out religious groups."¹¹⁹

Leeman promotes much more involvement in one's culture than MacArthur would advocate. With a focus on submission as seen in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, he promotes the concept found in Jeremiah 29:7, where Jeremiah calls for the Israelites to "seek the welfare of the city." To this end, Leeman moves the dividing line to only specific instances of governmental encroachment on theological matters. The state does not have a right to tell Christians how to worship, but the state does have jurisdiction over issues such as fire code and occupancy code, even in churches. Instead of opposing the government over mundane issues, Christians should seek to elevate their cultural and political contexts as believers who can promote the ways of God to those around them. This should result in personal holiness which affects others to the glory of God. He instructs to guide Christians so that they can make a difference in their communities based on the Word of God. Leeman appears to advocate for a form of adapting to the government while advocating for Christians to confront and change society on an individual basis.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Leeman, "Must Churches Follow Mask Mandates?," *9Marks* (blog), September 20, 2021, <https://www.9marks.org/article/must-churches-follow-mask-mandates/>, "The Nature of the Government's Authority," paragraphs 1-2.

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Leeman, "When Should Churches Reject Governmental Guidelines on Gathering and Engage in Civil Disobedience?," *9Marks* (blog), May 2, 2020, <https://www.9marks.org/article/when-should-churches-reject-governmental-guidelines-on-gathering-and-engage-in-civil-disobedience/>, "Two Reasons for Civil Disobedience."

Viewpoints on Submission to the State

From the historical survey one can see three primary ways in which Christians have analyzed church and state relations: sphere authority, contractual view of government, and a limited call of submission to the government. These positions stand in contrast to this dissertation which advocates for a direct line of submission to the state on the basis of one's own submission to God. This direct line approach entails submitting to one's civil authorities as long as one's ultimate submission is not hindered by the government commanding an action prohibited by biblical commands or God's nature or prohibiting actions which God commands. The concern is not to be on the moral nature of those who hold political office, the official's adherence to the laws, nor on the encroachment of one sphere of authority on another sphere's authority. Instead, the focus must be placed upon whether or not the individual's submission is flowing out of one's submission to God while maintaining the primary submission to God.

If a believer must disobey a governmental official, Christians must do so because of God's commands or nature and with a respectful and honoring manner as will be shown while exegeting the New Testament passages. Submitting to one's government does not indicate that the government is acting in a wise or honorable manner, but submitting to the state does indicate one is following God's command to follow His delegated authorities. Submission to the state also does not require that a Christian should not speak out against ills in society. Instead, Christians should use their submission to create opportunities to speak out against ungodly aspects in society by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

While this dissertation proposes a more all-encompassing perspective concerning the extent of the Bible's call for submission to civil authorities, other believers have submitted different perspectives on this topic. These different views fall into three primary camps of

thought: a contractual view of government, limitations on submission, and spheres of authority. Of course, these three camps of thought often interact with each other, but each one of these categories offer a different focus regarding what the Bible intends when calling for Christians to submit to civil authorities. However, this dissertation will show how these perspectives ultimately fall short of the Bible's intended meaning of submission to the state.

Submission Only to Legitimate Government: Contractual Government

Some Christians read Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 as a form of contract between those who govern and the governed. They see this type of contract due to the Bible's statements which indicate some of the government's responsibilities as established by God. Nathan Busenitz states this when he wrote "passages like Romans 13 *define* [emphasis mine] God's intention for governing authorities."¹²⁰ These Bible passages are then seen as being directed to those in government positions as a prescription for how they are to govern. Wayne Grudem follows this line of thought as he attempts to answer whether or not one should ever work to overthrow a government. He views the American Revolution in light of this contractual view of government since, in his opinion, he viewed King George III's actions as violating his responsibilities as the civil leader, so people had the right to overthrow an abuser of God's given authority.¹²¹ This follows the line of thinking established by Knox and Mayhew. Since the government failed in its duties, the contract between the government and the people is voided.

¹²⁰ Nathan Busenitz, "Five Biblical Principles" in Nathan Busenitz and James Coates, *God Vs. Government: Taking a Biblical Stand When Christ & Compliance Collide* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 124.

¹²¹ Grudem, *Politics*, 89–90.

As part of his justification, he uses the judges of Israel as examples of God using people to do His work in tearing down and building up governments.¹²²

Those who hold to a form of contractual government see both sides operating based on an agreement of responsibilities. This perspective teaches that the government exists to encourage those who are doing good and punish those who are doing bad, and the people should commit to submit to the government because of the services rendered by the state. If one side breaks the agreement, the other party has the duty to force the errant party to adhere to the contract. However, this assumes that presenting this contractual form of government was God's intention as Peter and Paul wrote their respective passages. Of course, all will be accountable to God, but these passages will be shown that they do not indicate any type of instruction that individual Christians are to force the government to adhere to a set of guidelines. Instead, Christians are to concern themselves with letting the Spirit guide them for their own actions towards the government so that the name of Jesus is proclaimed in a godly way.

In his analysis on Calvin's writings on this topic, Sam Waldron notes the absence of teaching on political authority being derived from the people and monitored by the people. Instead, he notes Calvin's teaching that neither the form of government nor the godliness of those in office should affect one's submission to the state.¹²³ The focus must be on God being the one who supplies authority and not the people of a country nor the moral uprightness of those in positions of authority. This would then require submission to the state even if the state is limiting civil rights of the people since the basis for a government's rule does not reside within the people of that nation but upon God supplying that government authority. Christians must remind

¹²² Grudem, *Politics*, 91.

¹²³ Sam Waldron, *Political Revolution in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Biblical Critique* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2022), 23–24.

themselves that Peter and Paul both wrote while within the Roman Empire, yet the focus of their writings was on Christians' responsibilities to live for Jesus instead of instructing Christians in how they should seek to correct or overthrow Rome.

This same principle holds true when viewing the other relationships in the Bible in which *ὑποτάσσω* is used to describe how Christians should interact with others. One should not view some type of conditional behavior based on a contract, for Paul told the believers in Ephesus to be "submitting to one another out of *reverence for Christ* [emphasis mine]" (Ephesians 5:21). The focus is on representing and honoring Jesus in one's relationships and not on the worthiness of the other person. Instead of viewing civil governments as only legitimate if they adhere to one's view of how a government should operate, one should view civil governments as something established directly by God. Jonathan Leeman summarizes this when he writes that "the authority of government does not derive from the consent of the governed or a social contract; it derives from the one who 'requires' justice."¹²⁴ A contractual based submission places greater authority into the hands of individuals which the Bible does not indicate. This type of submission also is dependent upon each person's understanding of how a government should or should not govern its people. This makes each person the one who defines the parameters of a government even though the Bible teaches that God is the one who delegates authority to the state.

A contractual based submission takes accountability for the government into the hands of the people instead of relying on God to keep officials accountable for how they govern. Submission is then based upon one's own evaluation of the government instead of being based

¹²⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule*, SCDS (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 196.

on one's own complete submission to God. In the end, Matthew 22, Romans 13, and 1 Peter 2 must be understood as addressing believers and how they are to reveal their own dependency on God as they submit to God by those who have been given authority by God.

Limited Submission: Restricting the Extent of the Call to Submit

Usually tied into the first group mentioned is the concept that God desires for the civil government to be restricted to two duties: approve of those who do good and punish those who do bad. This understanding comes from both Romans 13:3-4 and 1 Peter 2:14 which mention these duties as part of the government's responsibilities. As some see these passages, they believe that a civil government should only operate with these two goals in mind with very limited involvement from the government in other aspects of life. Of course, the application of this concept does extend beyond a simple understanding of the role of government. For example, those who hold to a limited governing role for civil authorities would agree that a government's duty includes defending against invading armies since this would be part of what it means to punish those who seek to do wrong, but the general idea in this view is for a government to let people manage their own lives.

When attempting to confront the issue of government-mandated public masking, Anthony Forsyth sees this issue falling outside of the Bible's parameters for government authority. He wrote that "when Caesar says you have to wear one [a mask], he has strayed out of his God-delegated boundaries."¹²⁵ He argues that mask mandates do not fall under his view of governmental responsibilities since this neither helps those who do good nor punishing those who do evil. James Coates, as a pastor in Canada who faced pressure from his government

¹²⁵ Anthony Forsyth, *Caesar and the Church: A Biblical Study of Government and Church* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2022), 124.

concerning COVID restrictions, believes that “the role of a government is to protect the undeniable rights given to man at creation, and it fulfills this purpose by upholding law and order, punishing evil, and *getting out of the way* [emphasis mine].”¹²⁶

Fundamental to this discussion is the reality that people see Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 as all-inclusive instructions concerning the extent of the government’s roles. However, these passages were not written for those in positions of authority but for believers under the government’s authority. These passages were written to encourage Christians as they labored under an ungodly regime. The motivation for the call to submit was to represent Jesus to the unsaved world while honoring Him with their lives. These passages were not intended to teach parameters on the role of governments but to instruct Christians in their lives.

Additionally, even if these passages were intended to instruct government officials, one must also embrace the reality that people will interpret the application of these instruction in different ways. While one person may see mask mandates as government intrusion, others see mask mandates as part of what the Bible meant for those who do good, by stopping the spread of a deadly disease, seeing the approval of the government. In an article written in 1983, Kenneth Kantzer and Paul Fromer embrace the belief that the government is biblically wrong if it attempts to forbid worship, yet they acknowledge the government’s role in mandating safe building and occupancy requirements.¹²⁷ Fast forward to the time of COVID, and one can see this same argument taking place when the government began restricting occupancy levels in an attempt to prevent the spread of a deadly disease. This brief example illustrates the danger if

¹²⁶ Coates, “Directing Government to Its Duty” in *God Vs. Government*, 179.

¹²⁷ Kenneth Kantzer and Paul Fromer, “When Should Christians Stand Against the Law?” in *Dual Citizens: Politics and American Evangelism*, ed. Timothy Padgett (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 452.

submission to the government is based upon one's interpretation of the government's role in society instead of being based upon God's unchanging nature.

God has not assigned Christians the task of keeping a government within a certain box concerning its use of God's authority. Instead, God has instructed His followers to live submissively to the government since the government is a servant of God fulfilling His purposes on earth. The only times in which a believer must confront governmental overreach is when placed into a situation similar to Acts 5:27-32 when the government overreaches God's commands or nature which would lead to a Christian sinning against God by action or inaction. Other than those times of conflict between the government and God's standards, Christians are called to live submissively for the glory of God.

Sphere Authority: Competing Spheres of Derived Authority

Another way to understand the biblical role of the government follows the teaching of Martin Luther and continued into the modern time by individuals such as John MacArthur. Luther began the idea of different spheres of authority. These spheres, the church and the state, receive authority from God for different parts of life. In this view, the spheres can sometimes overlap with other spheres. One such example could be in educating children as parents are to educate their own children, yet the state also has a vested interest in helping to educate their populace. Those who hold to this view of various spheres of authority have to then determine which sphere has precedence when there is conflict between these spheres of authority. Nathan Busenitz believes that one of the duties of those who hold authority in the different spheres is to actively push against encroachment from other spheres.¹²⁸ Specifically, he believes that

¹²⁸ Busenitz, "The Statement" in *God Vs. Government*, 34.

“Christian leaders have often needed to push back against aggressive state officials” throughout church history.¹²⁹ Practically, this has led to a belief system which requires the various spheres to be constantly engaged at pushing back at other spheres based on each sphere’s understanding of their role in society as holders of God’s authority.

When a government goes beyond one’s perception for the extent of a government’s sphere of authority, the government can step into a role that some Christians can view as their own responsibility. For example, Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker believe that the church is the one tasked with the responsibility to care for the poor, so when the government takes on the responsibility of establishing a system of care for the poor, they view this as governmental incursion against the Bible’s instructions.¹³⁰ This view concerning spheres of authority has led to many embracing this idea that the spheres are competing with each other.

Instead of competing with another holder of God’s authority, Christians should focus on the Bible’s instruction for their own actions towards the state. They are to live in submission to the civil authorities for the Lord’s sake. In other words, living submissively to those in positions of civil authority is a way to fulfill God’s will for one’s life. Christians are not tasked with the mission to govern the government.¹³¹ Christians are tasked with comparing their own actions against God’s instructions and nature to see if they are pleasing God with their actions. Instead of viewing the various aspects of society as competing spheres, one must focus on understanding how one should live on the basis of God’s instruction while embracing the sovereignty of God. This is the direct line approach which is focused on maintaining one’s submission to God first

¹²⁹ Busenitz, “The Statement” in *God Vs. Government*, 38–39.

¹³⁰ Harrison and Walker, *Just Thinking*, 19–20.

¹³¹ An exception to this would be for those Christians who hold government positions or by citizens who use their civil responsibilities to vote for different aspects of the government.

and then submitting to the government as long as one can maintain that direct service to God. God will hold all accountable for how they use His delegated authority, and God will hold each Christian accountable for how he or she lives submissively to that delegated authority. Christians are given the responsibility, according to 1 Timothy 2:1-2, to pray to the Sovereign King over the whole earth to influence government leaders so that Christians can live peaceable and quiet lives. God is the one who establishes and removes governments, and God is the one who will hold all authorities accountable to His standards of conduct. Christians must trust in God's plan as they live for God's glory in this world.

Conclusion of Historical Perspective

There is no consensus among Christians for how to interact with one's government, how to instruct the believers in their actions and views of the government, or how to understand the relevant passages in the Bible concerning the relationship between believers and the state. However, in spite of this lack of consensus, there are lessons to learn from history. The first lesson from history is that one's circumstances have the potential to greatly impact one's application of what it means to submit to government. The early church was under an oppressive government and society, so they tended to focus much more on personal holiness and witness while warning against becoming too involved in civil service due to the pervasiveness of false worship.

The Reformation Christians had to deal with a state which was also controlled by a false religion, but they had the benefit of some local civil leaders who were willing to protect the Reformers. This time represented different attempts at both religious and political reform by the believers. The New England pastors desired freedom from the increasing encroachments of England, so they pushed for freedom from oppressors. German Christians had to figure out what

to do in a government which was rapidly growing immoral and opposed different thinking, and modern American Christians have to balance civil freedoms, or a loss of some of those freedoms, while having a say in politics. In spite of the differences in circumstances, Wayne Grudem argues that the biblical example highlights the need for believers to influence their government by living for the glory of God while remaining part of a nation.¹³² The difficulty is in determining how to accomplish this.

Each timeframe shows the prominent voices focusing on their responses to what is happening around them. This is unavoidable as Bible exposition requires properly handling modern applications of the timeless truths of Scripture. In terms of application, submitting to a government which is antithetical to biblical positions represents a difficult challenge for believers, so this begs the question of how the laws of the lands should look if Christians are in charge? Should Christians legislate morality and force biblical standards on others? There is tension between one's civil freedoms and how a Christian lives out his or her faith in public.

Finally, when is a Christian permitted to reject the authority of government? Each time period presents, as well as the different perspectives within those times, a slightly different answer as some societies saw most actions as relating to worship while others were predominantly secular in nature. The answer to this question is central to the purpose of this dissertation that submission to one's government must be complete unless the government compels action or inaction that would violate God's commands or nature. This survey into the church's past, as diverse as the perspectives are, provides the starting point and some guidance for each related chapter on the pursuit of answering the biggest question: on what basis must a believer submit to the government? This historical survey has revealed primarily application of

¹³² Grudem, *Politics*, 61.

the relevant texts while offering some insights into the methods used by past Christians as to how they arrived at the application. From this historical starting point, the required hermeneutical system must be built before diving into exegesis of the important passages on the topic. A foundational principle to this issue is the reality that God is sovereign over all nations. As sovereign King, his people are called to represent him to the nations for his glory according to his standards of righteousness.¹³³

¹³³ Grudem, *Politics*, 117–18.

Hermeneutical Approach

The historical survey offers several examples of believers who have interpreted the Scriptures and applied various passages to the issue of the church's interactions with civil governments. The Christians mentioned attempted to rightly apply the biblical passages to their contexts, yet church history has shown a great deal of disagreement on this topic as each person and group holds to different dividing lines as to when they would disobey or contend with the government. These divergent perspectives are due, in part, to the different methodologies of studying and applying the Bible to their situations. Some Christians focus on the Sermon on the Mount while others highlight Israel's conquest of Canaan. Some Christians have had to interact with hostile governments while others are involved with favorable governments. In his article relating to one's method of study, Patrick Hart points out that one's approach to the text is typically a collection of procedures which also influenced by one's attitude and mindset.¹ Thus, Christians' conflicts or agreements with their governments can influence their approach to relevant biblical passages.

Christians carry much with them to the text which can interfere with the message of Scripture. This can be seen throughout church history as believers have attempted to apply biblical passages to their situations, and developing one's biblical view of involvement with the state while going through a difficult situation can lead to an unintentional blindness to the bigger context of the issue. Each example is colored, to one extent or another, by the exegete's situation, for each person is attempting to correctly apply the Bible directly to the situation he is facing. Believers can face very different situations based upon the very different political situations

¹ Patrick Hart, "Theory, Method, and Madness in Religious Studies," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (2016): 16.

which range from antagonistic governments to cooperative ones, so each believer would have approached his situation from a different starting position mentally.

Abner Chou stresses the importance of remaining focused on understanding the mindset and purpose of the authors of the texts.² One cannot hope to apply biblical passages properly without first seeking to understand the purpose of those passages in their original situations. The original authorial intent should be guiding the study and application of every passage in the Bible, for each author wrote while being directed by God to effectively communicate God's message to humanity (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The authorial intent must instruct the reader as to the primary purpose of a passage. From this point of focusing on authorial intent, Christians can then use that original intent to begin the process of applying biblical passages to their own situations.

As seen in the historical survey, some Christians have primarily focused on either Old Testament narrative accounts of Israel's entrance into Canaan and the book of Judges or the Sermon on the Mount to form their own understanding of biblical teaching on submission to civil authorities. These Old Testament passages have been used as justification for rebelling against corrupt authorities, and the Sermon on the Mount has been used to formulate a passivist's perspective or withdrawal from governmental involvement. Focusing on a few passages for the topic of submission to civil authorities is one cause for the divide between belief systems. This dissertation will show that the Bible does have a great deal to say on the topic, so an isolated focus on just one passage or book will result in an incomplete picture of biblical teaching on this topic.

² Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), 18.

Even if one chooses to narrow one's focus to a section of the Bible, the authorial intent of both the Old Testament historical books and the Sermon on the Mount needs to provide the basis for how one should approach and apply these sections of the Bible. From this starting position of seeking out the original intent of a passage, one can then gain insights into the nature of God and God's expectations for His followers from these sections of Scripture. For this dissertation, the historical narratives of Joshua and Judges as well as the Sermon on the Mount will be used as examples of applying this dissertation's methodology to see if these passages should be the primary passages for how Christians should be interacting with their governments. Because of the use of these passages as the basis for the more extreme perspectives, this dissertation will seek out whether or not the conquest of Canaan, the book of Judges, or the Sermon on the Mount should be used by Christians when developing a biblical understanding of submission to one's civil authority. After these two sections of the Bible are addressed, this dissertation will continue onto Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 which are typically the primary passages for a discussion on the Bible's teaching concerning civil authorities.

Methodology

The nature of how believers should submit to their government requires a study from both the Old and New Testaments. Some narrative sections do offer valuable information concerning God's expectation for His followers, but what enables a passage, or a truth taught in that passage, to be used to inform a modern audience? Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays use the analogy of a river which separates a modern audience from the original audience due to differences of cultures, languages, and other such areas of life between the two groups.³ This

³ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Third edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 40.

river must be bridged in order to take the original intent of the author and rightly apply that intent to a different audience. To build this bridge, one must first understand that original intention for the passage as it was applied to the original audience by using the historical and literary information supplied by the author.

Biblical passages must be first read within their original contexts while seeking out the authorial intent of the passages. From there, the individual passages must be connected to their larger contexts within their biblical books and then to the rest of the Bible. Connecting an individual passage to the larger context of the Bible will help confirm whether or not one's understanding of the passage is valid and fits with the rest of the Bible.⁴ After this is done, one should be able to see if a passage does or does not add to the discussion of biblical submission to civil authorities. If a passage does aid believers with this topic, that passage can then be incorporated into the discussion, and exegesis of that passage can continue.

Authorial Intent

When approaching the Bible, one must begin with an understanding that God is the ultimate Author of the Bible. John Frame mentions that the Bible has ultimate authority to dictate humanity's actions and way of thinking, and this ultimate authority is revealed through God's purposeful choice of words and phrases used to communicate God's intentions.⁵ The authority of the Bible is due to God being the ultimate Author who communicated His will through human authors to write the Bible. This truth is seen in 2 Timothy 3:16 where it says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." God wrote the Bible through human authors to communicate His nature and commands to mankind. God directed the human authors who wrote in their own writing

⁴ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 45.

⁵ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2010), 54.

styles to specific people groups in specific contexts as He communicated His timeless truths. To rightly apply the Bible to one's modern context, one must first seek out the one authorial intent for that passage.

Grant Osborne illustrates this process by placing implicit authority into the text, derived authority in the interpretation, and applied authority into the contextualization of the text.⁶ Since God is the source of all authority, His Word inherently contains authority over people's lives. Peoples' interpretation of that authoritative Word is not perfect, so interpretation of the Word is not implicit authority but derived from the Word to the extent it is faithful to the intention of the author. God directed the human authors as they wrote with God's authority. Believers then should derive their interpretations from the authority of the text, based on the authorial intent of the passage, and apply the passage based on the inherent authority of God's written Word. Christians do not have their own authority to compel others, for God's Word holds that authority. The task for Christians is to connect others to the truths of God in His Word through application of the text as they bridge the gap between the original context and their own situations.

Antecedent Theology

God used each subsequent human author, from Genesis to Revelation, to further develop the canon of Scripture. Later authors built upon the foundation laid by previous authors, so previously given Scripture helps to illuminate later biblical passages. This is known as antecedent theology. Antecedent theology teaches that information in the Bible is cumulative instead of later passages influencing older passages.⁷ Theological concepts are built upon

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Revised and Expanded edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 25–26.

⁷ Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 137.

previous revelation as later authors interpret and incorporate what has come before them into their own messages from God. This means that the command to submit to one's civil government in Romans 13 does not originate in that passage but is built upon previously given information and teaching and is further developed by Paul. Paul wrote Romans 13 with full knowledge of biblical characters like Joseph and Daniel, and Paul also wrote Romans 13 to teach a specific group of believers in a specific context how to live within God's parameters for His people showing how his target audience should be living out these instructions in their own context.

The Bible was given to people through progressive revelation which developed mankind's understanding regarding living for God in every situation. Before applying each passage to one's own context, one must first seek to understand the original authorial intent of that passage, connect that purpose to the narrative of Scripture, bridge the differences between the original audience and one's own situation, and then apply that purpose to one's own context. Sections of the Bible must not be divorced from that arch of biblical interpretation used by the biblical authors in communicating God's message to the world.

Exegetical Focus

With the goal to understand the authorial intent of a passage using the literary clues left by the author, one can begin the work of exegeting the text. To exegete a passage is to study a passage with the intention of letting the passage inform the reader about the author's "single truth-intention" through the author's use of language.⁸ Because of the need to understand the passage as the author wrote it, Walter Kaiser emphasizes the need to focus on the text instead of one's own "prejudices, feelings, judgments, or concerns."⁹ The emphasis must be placed on

⁸ Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

unearthing the original passage within its original context. The focus must be placed on grasping the original intent of the author as given through the literary construction of the text with its original context. Inductive biblical study focuses on the interpretation of the text which then establishes the boundaries on applying the text.¹⁰ With this process, the focus is on God's message and purpose behind the passage instead of depending on the ever-changing contexts of those who read the passage.

This is how any piece of literature must be read. Readers must seek to engage with the author's original purpose in writing in order to rightly benefit from reading. This is the point that Walter Kaiser made while encouraging preachers to do the work necessary to understand the biblical authors' intentions for the passages.¹¹ The original authors were purposeful in choosing the right words in the right literary context to convey their messages.¹² This means that one cannot just assume one's own context can be inserted into the biblical text without first establishing the authorial intent. Abner Chou uses the examples of the various biblical authors who referenced previously revealed Scripture. They created a chain of "careful exegesis of prior revelation."¹³ Later biblical authors sought to understand previously written Scripture within its own original contexts before applying a passage to their own contexts. Later authors carefully referenced previous passages to continue biblical themes, and they depended on the original authorial intent of previous authors to lend support and continuity to their own messages.

¹⁰ Richard Alan Fuhr and Andreas Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 291.

¹¹ Walter Kaiser, "The Modern Aversion from Authorial Intentionality and from 'Making Points' in a Sermon," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 13, no. 2 (September 2013): 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹³ Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 21.

The Old Testament narrative sections do offer modern readers much information about God and how He worked throughout human history to accomplish His plans. Biblical historical passages offer a retelling of historical events, but these accounts do so with theological intention. Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton explain that historical passages in the Old Testament contain “theological meaning and instruction” which reveal the actions of God and demand a response from the recipients based on the theological intent.¹⁴ The narrative passages contain a great deal of historical information, but this information is provided to drive the reader to the theological revelation about God. The historical information is relevant in that it reveals God at work in human history, but this does not mean that the historical information is prescriptive. Historical narrative is one of the means used by God through human authors to communicate His nature and commands to humanity. With this in mind, believers must seek to use the historical information in the Bible to see the theological truths within those passages.

Once the authorial intent of a passage is established, the exegete must then search out the passage’s connection to the larger passage, to the biblical book, and then to the overall narrative of Scripture. As Walter Kaiser explains, passages are “pieces of the puzzle [which] need to be related to the whole structure of a writer’s thought.”¹⁵ As the story of the Bible continues, one can see how each successive biblical author built upon previously established revelation. The New Testament writings on submission to one’s civil government are based on one’s ultimate submission to God and obedience to His commands, and this is developed throughout the entire Bible. This is why one cannot focus on just one passage or book but trace the biblical development of a theme throughout the Bible.

¹⁴ Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2002), 224–25.

¹⁵ Walter Kaiser, “Hermeneutics and the Theological Task,” *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 3.

Throughout church history, some believers have used Old Testament narratives as the primary passages to develop their theology of human government, and this includes John Knox who used the books of Joshua and Judges as instruction for his own life and his quest to remove corrupt officials from Scotland. His own context had some similarities to these passages as he was confronted a corrupt nation and church. He saw similarities between the execution of idolaters in Israel to his own situation and viewed the biblical accounts as justification for his own actions.¹⁶ Knox believed that the officials' corruption removed the need to submit to them, so he turned to biblical examples of God's people ousting idolaters. Because of the rampant corruption around him, he not only saw a need to stand in opposition against the corrupt officials, but he also went beyond the teachings of Luther or Calvin and extended the call to take up arms against corrupt officials to the common people. According to Francis Schaeffer, Knox taught that the common people not only had the right to stand up against corrupt officials, but it was their duty to do so. If they failed in this duty, they would stand in rebellion against God.¹⁷ Knox's view, according to Mark Larson, was that he "was a prophet of God, and Scotland was Israel" which needed cleansing from evil just as the biblical prophets had done.¹⁸

This type of practice can also be seen in the American colonies as Mark Larson sees a direct connection between Knox's teaching on this issue and the American Declaration of Independence.¹⁹ The New England pastors followed this example as they preached concerning the need to stand against England. They used Old Testament examples of those who resisted

¹⁶ Larson, "John Knox," 81.

¹⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 97.

¹⁸ Larson, "John Knox," 84–85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

errant civil authorities to justify their own actions.²⁰ To counteract those who preached about peace, they used language similar to Knox to provide caveats for the call of submission as found in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 by focusing on texts like those used by Knox from the Old Testament narratives.²¹

Knox did help establish a country where the Reformation was strongly rooted and did not cave to later pressures from the Catholics, yet his biblical focus was narrow as he offered biblical support for his actions. The Old Testament narrative sections that he used did describe a military purification of the land of Israel, yet the Bible also offers many passages which provide explicit teaching on the topic of believers' interactions with civil authorities.

Zwingli, another Reformer, landed on the other side of the issue compared to Knox as he focused upon the Sermon on the Mount, and this reveals part of the complexity of this issue and how one's narrow focus on just one section of Scripture can lead believers to very different end conclusions. To form a biblically based position, one must exegete a passage based on the literary, historical, and contextual information available while seeking out the authorial intent on a passage. Each passage must then be incorporated into the larger narrative of Scripture to see how other relevant passages are integrated into a cohesive position as later biblical passages further developed themes in the Bible while building upon previously provided revelation.

²⁰ John Thomas Scott, "On God's Side: The Problem of Submission in American Revolutionary Rhetoric," *Fides et Historia* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 113–14.

Old Testament Narrative Exegesis

Theological Intent of the Author

From the historical survey previously provided, one can see that many believers throughout church history have heavily relied upon use of the Old Testament historical books with a specific focus upon the Canaan conquest or the book of Judges. These historical books offer much in the way of examples from individuals who were influential in their times and who taught much about God, but this does not inherently mean that these people were to be copied in their actions or that a modern audience should model one's life or city after them. David Deuel states that "not all that occurs in narratives is truly timeless,"²² and this is based upon embracing the theological intent of the author which then informs the application of that passage to one's own time. Historical passages deliver a great deal of information as the authors communicate what happened as they developed their theological intention. Instead of trying to see a modern significance for every detail in a passage, one must use the literary clues within a passage to find the theological purpose of a passage as provided by the author. All Scripture is breathed out by God, but this does not necessitate a direct application of all information in the Bible to one's life.

Too often, modern readers of Old Testament narrative passages focus on the story elements instead of focusing upon the theological intent of the authors. The historical accounts use the details offered in order to move the reader along to the point of a passage. This is one of the points which Robert Alter makes. The biblical authors were skilled in their use of the written language to convey their intended theological focus, so one must read these accounts through the

²² David C Deuel, "Suggestions for Expository Preaching of Old Testament Narrative," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 2, no. 1 (1991): 52.

provided lenses of the literary features in the passage.²³ The exegetical process of studying the Bible as literature requires the examination of the theological intent of the passage. As Eugene Wilson highlights, exegesis consists of literary, historical, and theological exegesis working together to embrace “the application [which] must come from the theological intention of the text.”²⁴ This is based upon the presupposition that the Bible is divinely inspired, cohesive, and conveys God’s intended message to mankind, and this message is able to be understood by those who read it.²⁵ The Bible provides all of the necessary information for readers to grasp the theological intent of a passage.

Literary Indicators of the Text

The literature of the Old Testament narratives offers information to the reader as to the flow of the account and the focus of the narrative. The authors employed the prose style of their time to communicate information effectively about God and His plans.²⁶ However, the goal is not to get carried away by the literary prowess of the human author but to see the theological purpose of the text by means of the literature used by the authors. As Paul House states, one should not focus on the failures of Israel and how they were punished by God but should see the theological intent of God’s plans as well as His nature which is revealed through these interactions with humanity.²⁷ Antony Campbell agrees with House’s goal of seeing the theological purpose of the narrative accounts. Historical passages should not be read as just

²³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 54.

²⁴ Eugene A Wilson, “The Homiletical Application of Old Testament Narrative Passages,” *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 1 (1978): 85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶ Paul R House, “Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 67, no. 2 (2005): 230.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

historical surveys or records but as theological texts as God uses real events to communicate more about Himself.²⁸ If the historical narrative sections of the Bible were to be used as examples to imitate for future followers of God, there should be some exegetical clue within the text to indicate this purpose.

One should study the literary features employed by the author to convey the message of the text. This involves literary analysis which consists of narrative and linguistic features of the prose genre employed by the Old Testament narrative authors.²⁹ The Old Testament narratives were written within a different culture than the reader's culture, and the narratives employed a different way of writing. Modern readers are able to understand what was written during the time of the biblical events, but modern readers must embrace the reality that writings styles change over time. With this in mind, one can better understand the Old Testament by reading the text while embracing the styles of the biblical writers.³⁰

Using the passage's own literary features enables the reader to see the intended flow of the passage which will then highlight the purpose of that passage. Additionally, one must embrace, as much as possible, the original historical context of that passage along with the original intended audience. Robert Chisholm connects these important contextual clues to the theme of a passage, and this is part of what enables readers to understand the purpose of the passage.³¹ He also contrasts this method with pastors using narratives to illustrate a desired principle for their messages. Just because a narrative account could illustrate a good principle does not mean that the biblical account had that principle as its intended theme. One must go

²⁸ Antony F Campbell, "Old Testament Narrative as Theology," *Pacifica* 4, no. 2 (June 1991): 172.

²⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

³¹ Robert Chisholm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1998), 222.

through the process of first understanding the passage in its original context and after finding the authorial intent for that passage, one can then bridge the gap from the biblical writer's time to the reader's time. The application of any biblical passage must be based on the authorial intent of that passage. God directed the human authors to write in a way which faithfully communicates the purpose of the passage, and it is the task of the reader to understand that passage using the authors' clues to accomplish this task. To shy away from this process is to open oneself to wrongly apply God's Word.³²

Sermon on the Mount and Political Viewpoints

The Sermon on the Mount, located in Matthew 5-7, offers a penetrating look into the degree to which the Word of God should be affecting believers' lives. The Sermon was addressed to Jesus' disciples who were to be sent into the world as witnesses of Jesus. The Sermon has been used to create a worldview of passivism and detachment from world events. In part, this is due to a future eschatological perspective that emphasizes the kingdom of God established on earth. To this end, many who shape their political perspectives based upon the Sermon on the Mount end with a detached perspective from their worldly society in order to better maintain the ideals established in the Sermon. While Christians should understand the importance of Jesus' sermon, this teaching section alone should not be the lone voice for how the church formulates its perspective on biblical teaching concerning its relationship with the civil government.

John Battle emphasizes that the point of the Sermon is not to sequester oneself from the world as a monk but should affect how believers view their relationships and purpose in this

³² William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 62.

life.³³ While many of Jesus' statements would be easier to fulfill if one lived apart from others, this approach would miss the essence of the Sermon as it requires interactions with others.³⁴ The drive of Matthew's Gospel is seen in Matthew 28:19-20 where Christians are called to go and make disciples of the nations. The Great Commission requires Christians to be interacting with the unsaved as they teach all of the lessons learned directly from Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount establishes a very high standard of conduct for those who wish to follow Jesus. Because of this high standard, Christians have disagreed how to apply these chapters. Some have advocated for the Sermon to refer only to the future kingdom of God while others have taught that Christians can usher in the kingdom of God by living in accordance with the ethical and moral teachings of the Sermon. However, Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that these views miss the real life practicality of the beatitudes as well as the fact that Jesus was talking to specific people in an attempt to get them to change their current lives.³⁵

Just as there is debate concerning whether this passage is to be applied in one's current life or just the future kingdom, some seek to place the Sermon within a nuanced box. John Battle continued in his article that the Sermon's instructions "are not simply rules for better private behaviour [*sic*] but a development of the daily practice of what could be termed *social citizenship* [emphasis original]."³⁶ He seeks to apply the Sermon specifically to his focus on the political realm as others have done for their own areas of interest. Before specific application can

³³ John Battle, "The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (February 2009): 50.

³⁴ Matthew 5:13-16 shows the need for believers to live in such a way as to influence others based on one's dedication to the ways of Jesus. One's actions cannot cause others to glorify the Father if that person is isolated from others.

³⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 9–10.

³⁶ Battle, "The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics," 52.

be done, one must first establish the original intent of Matthew as he wrote this section and then connect this passage to the overall intent of the book. To accomplish this, this dissertation will give a brief survey of different perspectives and how they relate to the nature of submission to one's civil government.

Historical Positions on the Sermon on the Mount

Huldrych Zwingli advocated for his followers to adhere to the principles found within the Sermon on the Mount as the basis for how they operated their personal conduct and government.³⁷ Others followed his teachings as various Christian groups promoted a passive nature of life and a prohibition against military service, taking of vows, and violent acts. This was present in New England before the Revolutionary War, though those who held this view were in the minority.

While not specifically addressing the Sermon on the Mount, John Howard Yoder still promotes the same approach to society. He states that “worship is the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and of history.”³⁸ He advocates that a believer's conduct should be impacting how society is built, including the civil governmental structure. While this might make them targets of others in society due to the great differences between themselves and others, they see this call to be unique found within the commands of Jesus. Through their own faithfulness to Jesus regardless of social cost, they believe that they will bring about His rule on earth.³⁹ The Sermon on the Mount teaches disciples of Jesus to live for Him while also focusing on right living with others. Those who follow Zwingli's teachings believe that this type of life

³⁷ Klassen, “The Early Swiss,” 170-171.

³⁸ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics As Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

will transform society according to the standards of the Sermon on the Mount. This take on the Sermon on the Mount calls for all believers, both in their personal lives but also in the government, to live based on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. Hence, Zwingli advocated for thorough application of the Sermon on the Mount for the city of Zurich as it was his dividing line for how Christians were to live out the Bible in a practical way.

Martin Luther's take on the Sermon on the Mount, and others such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer who followed much of Luther's teaching, offers a different perspective. He views the Sermon as a message from Jesus which typifies "the difficulty of living the Christian life within the world."⁴⁰ From the justification offered through salvation, believers are enabled to live by the "moral injunctions" of the Sermon while living in such a corrupted world.⁴¹ In this view, the world and Christian living stand in stark contrast with each other. However, the Sermon illustrates that human endeavor alone is unable to fully satisfy God's standard of conduct, and this is seen in the extreme call of righteous living in the Sermon on the Mount.⁴² Instead of focusing too much on living out each detail in the Sermon, the Sermon should cause humility in a believer who will then live for God and others based on that humility as he or she sees Jesus Christ as the perfect example of righteous living.⁴³

Bonhoeffer mainly follows Luther's teaching on the topic. For his own ministry and writings, Bonhoeffer connects the Sermon on the Mount to his teaching on cheap and costly

⁴⁰ Susan Schreiner, "Martin Luther," in *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II*, ed. Jeffrey Greenman, Timothy Larson, and Stephen Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 109.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴² Hopkins, "Luther and Bonhoeffer," 35.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

grace.⁴⁴ As such, he sees the empty pursuit of attempting to living according to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount apart from the transforming work of God's grace. The Sermon exposes the need to depend on Jesus to follow Jesus, and the Sermon reveals the need to not become distracted by worldly pursuits like patriotism or pursuit of temporal power.⁴⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, in his chapter on Bonhoeffer, believes that the Sermon on the Mount informed all of Bonhoeffer's writings due to the Sermon on the Mount's central role to Christian discipleship.⁴⁶ The call of the Sermon on the Mount is a call to perfection based on the life of Jesus who is the model for all believers' lives.

The Sermon on the Mount and the Book of Matthew

Some have viewed Matthew as primarily a Jewish book talking about the future kingdom of God and have then interpreted the Sermon on the Mount on this basis. For example, John Walvoord sees Matthew as a book which focuses on Jesus' kingly role and the Sermon on the Mount then offers the moral principles which govern that kingdom.⁴⁷ He does also place emphasis on the need to see the Sermon as given to its original audience in spite of his focus on the realization of the future kingdom. In his opinion, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount provides both commands for one's current life as well as an eschatological focus with a view on the ideal society during Jesus' rule on earth.⁴⁸ His view illustrates the difficulty in applying the ideals found within the Sermon on the Mount.

⁴⁴ Hopkins, "Luther and Bonhoeffer," 47.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Howard Yoder," in *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries*, 211–12.

⁴⁷ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 1974), 43.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44-45.

This balance between one's current actions and a future outlook focused on Jesus' future kingdom falls in line with the purpose statement of the Gospel of Matthew found in Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus' final words in this book commission Jesus' disciples to go out and make disciples based on Jesus' own teaching. Matthew offers several sermons by Jesus which form the basis for how the disciples are to teach others the ways of Jesus, and this needs to include the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon needs to be part of the disciple making process as it teaches a full experience of living for Jesus, so the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount must be connected to the disciple-making process instead of a manual for governments.

Matthew 5:17 and 7:12 both address the Law and the Prophets as a type of bookends for the Sermon.⁴⁹ These verses ground the rest of the Sermon on the reality that Jesus' teaching stems from the Old Testament while also furthering its teaching to reach deeper into the hearts of believers. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5-7 goes beyond the teaching of others during His day as He teaches with authority in a way to impact His listeners. These bookends would then suggest that the Sermon is connected into what it should have meant to follow God's laws and nature. In other words, the Sermon should be seen as focusing on living for God with one's life.

Following Luther's train of thought concerning the need for regeneration in order to even pursue the standards in this passage, John Stott offers further commentary for how Christians should view the high standards of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, "the standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable by every man, nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's Sermon; to put them within everybody's is to ignore the reality of man's sin."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, EGGNT (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 49.

⁵⁰ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 29.

In many ways, the Sermon on the Mount echoes the call from God to “be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). The standard is perfection based on the perfection of God, yet God also understands mankind’s sin nature. At the center of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ instruction to His disciples on how to pray. It offers instruction on both seeking forgiveness from God and being willing to forgive others (Matthew 6:5-15). Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers insight on applying the Sermon on the Mount to one’s life. First, one must seek the necessity of being transformed by the salvation offered through Jesus, and secondly, one must seek the Sermon as “the direct road to blessing” as one pursues this high calling of a transformed life lived based on Jesus’ own instructions.⁵¹ Complete fulfillment of the Sermon’s instructions may not be possible until the kingdom is realized, but adapting one’s life to the Sermon is a worthy pursuit as one grows in sanctification as a disciple of Jesus and teaches others how to be a disciple of Jesus.

Conclusion

In order to define one’s biblical stance on any issue, one must first understand the authorial intent of a passage before using that passage to build a position on a topic. Then, one must bridge the time and cultural gaps between the original target audience of a passage before application of the text to one’s own situation. This approach of first establishing the authorial intent and then gleaning the universal truths from the biblical text enables believers to know God’s intentions for His followers. To use the Old Testament narratives or the Sermon on the Mount for applying submission to, or rejection of, one’s civil authority requires finding if the original authors intended for those passages to be used in this way. Without a clear indication that these passages were intended to be used while forming a theology about government or

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 13.

submission to one's government, these passages should not be used as a basis for developing a theology of submission to one's government. Even if these passages are applicable for this topic, these passages should not be taken in isolation from other relevant biblical passages. This does not mean that these passages offer no insight on the topic, but they should not be used to form the foundation for one's system of belief without a direct connection to the topic by means of authorial intent, for authorial intent should be what guides how a passage is applied to one's life.⁵²

The author intended meaning for a passage must be at the forefront of theological studies, and this is revealed through an exegetical study of each passage and by using the author provided literary clues to understand the passage.⁵³ This dissertation will employ this exegetical study and will use passages where the author intended to either provide direct commands relating to this dissertation's topic or reveal key information about God's character which would impact this study. With this in mind, this dissertation will not analyze every potential passage in the Bible which could impact this study but narrow in on selected passages in the Old and New Testaments which provide enough pertinent information as to build a foundational basis for a biblical theology of submission to one's civil authority.

⁵² Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 24.

⁵³ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 197.

Old Testament Exegesis

Introduction

Exodus 1:8-22 tells of the account of Pharaoh ordering the death of every male child of the Israelites while the people of Israel were still under Egypt's control. The Hebrew midwives were specifically ordered to kill the male children, yet Exodus 1:17 mentions that the "midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commended them, but let the male children live." Because of the midwives' actions, God blessed them with families of their own. However, the midwives' actions put them in direct opposition to the command of Pharaoh, yet the passage is clear in stating that the women were more focused on living based on fearing God instead of obeying a command which would put them in opposition to God. According to Douglas Stuart, the midwives' action of sparing the male children revealed that they understood "that right and wrong are not human inventions but part of a divinely created order."¹ The lives of the male children were highly valued due to the midwives' fear of the Lord and understanding of God's commands concerning life. The civil leader did not have the right to supersede God's established standard of righteousness and God's value of life. One can see God's blessing on the midwives as He provided them their own families and as the people of Israel continued to multiply (Exodus 1:21).

John Durham sees the primary conflict of this passage being the theological battle which takes place between God's view on human life and promises He originally gave to Abraham concerning his descendants and Pharaoh's attempt to kill life and stem the growth of the people

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 79.

of Israel.² In this passage, the midwives had to determine which leader to follow: Pharaoh or God. This passage represents the primary focus of this dissertation as to what submission to civil authorities should entail for the church age when commands from one's civil government are in conflict with either God's commands or God's nature. While the people of Israel were in Egypt and given this command from Pharaoh, the midwives knew that obedience to him would conflict with their primary submission to God. The Old Testament offers many examples of God's people who face this same issue while they live under the authority of foreign nations in ways similar to the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1. While there were several kings of the Israelites who were apostates, this dissertation will take a more narrow approach by focusing on three individuals who served God while serving secular rulers in foreign nations as this setting is similar to the contexts of New Testament passages on this topic.

The lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah offer examples of individuals who lived out their faith while directly serving under civil leaders, and these individuals did so while maintaining a primary focus on submission to God. At stake with these individuals and their work for foreign powers is the testimony of God's followers while they are within a nation which did not worship God, and their interactions with the various civil authorities will pit the gods of the nations against the God they serve. As Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredricks point out for Joseph and Daniel, God will reveal Himself to be in control of the nations even as God's people are not within their own nation.³ God will win the conflict as the people of the nations see if their gods are stronger than the God of these individuals.

² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC (Waco, TX: Nelson Books, 1987), 12–13.

³ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2001), 538.

These individuals also play a part in moving along the narrative of God's redemptive history in the Old Testament. Old Testament narratives use the actions of people to communicate theological truths to later readers,⁴ so while these three individuals' accounts were not recorded for the primary purpose of teaching future generations about submission to government leaders, their lives do show how they practically lived out their faith while surrounded by cultures inundated with false worship. Joshua Philpot argues that the lives of Joseph and Daniel, in particular, appear to be literarily and thematically connected as the author of Daniel purposefully wrote in such a way as to connect the life of Daniel back to the life of Joseph.⁵ His article reveals the connections between these two individuals as they both interpret dreams for foreign kings and serve their kings in various ways while maintaining a proper relationship with God. Nehemiah's situation is presented in a different manner, yet he is a high ranking governmental official who still seeks formal permission from his king before taking on the endeavor to restore the walls of Jerusalem.

Through these three individuals and their responses to governmental leaders and secular pressure to change away from service to God, modern readers can formulate a basic picture of these men's theological foundations and what their beliefs were concerning God's expectations for their actions. Their lives are, presumably, based upon what they have been taught about God, and this dissertation will then incorporate lessons from their lives into the broader narrative of Scripture. This dissertation will show that Paul and Peter were basing their teaching on submission to civil governments as they gleaned information on this topic from earlier biblical passages. The lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah will easily fit into the developing biblical

⁴ Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 334.

⁵ Joshua M Philpot, "Was Joseph a Type of Daniel?: Typological Correspondence in Genesis 37-50 and Daniel 1-6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 4 (December 2018): 685.

theology of submission to one's civil authority which is primarily based on one's ultimate submission to God, and these examples will show that the New Testament authors did not write completely new information but wrote based on previous revelation and examples.

Joseph's Testimony in Egypt

The account of Joseph in Genesis covers more ground than what will be discussed in this dissertation. Instead of interacting with Joseph's entire life, just a handful of chapters will be utilized including chapters 39, 41, and part of 47. These chapters focus both on Joseph's character while employed by Egyptian officials and his service to those officials. The goal for this section of the dissertation is to ascertain Joseph's understanding of God's expectations for him in terms of both maintaining a proper relationship with God but also being willing to make the best of the situation as orchestrated by God. Joseph was uprooted from his family and placed in the hands of pagans, yet he faithfully served Pharaoh while representing the greatness and supremacy of God.

This study is not meant to undermine the theological focus of the Joseph narrative which climaxes in Genesis 50:15-21 as God's sovereignty and plan are proclaimed.⁶ God is sovereign and is able to transform individuals' attempts at evil and turn those actions into something good which glorifies God. Instead of trying to overshadow or ignore the theological intent of the author, this dissertation will show that Joseph was used by God to accomplish God's purposes, and he did so while clearly giving testimony of God's supremacy while serving as a witness in a secular government. While serving Pharaoh, Joseph maintained a primary focus on complete

⁶ Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, vol. 2, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 489.

submission to God, who is the supreme Sovereign, and not primarily on Pharaoh, who is merely an earthly sovereign established by God.

Joseph's Situation and Mindset

Joseph's situation in Genesis 39 finds him in the home of Potiphar after being sold into slavery by his own brothers. Right before this account, it is worth noting that Genesis 38 reveals Judah's dive into sexual sin after the death of his wife. Chapter 39 then stands in contrast to Judah's failure to live morally as Joseph is in a foreign situation due to the jealous actions of his brothers. Instead of living in misery, Joseph serves Potiphar and encapsulates God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1-3). Here, Joseph blesses the house of Potiphar as an overseer over his house.⁷ Joseph, as a descendant of Abraham who was faithful to the ways of the Lord, was able to bless someone outside of that Abrahamic blessing. The circumstances were not favorable to Joseph, yet Genesis 39:2 indicates that "the Lord was with Joseph," and God made him successful as a slave in Potiphar's house.

In verse four, the Bible mentions that Joseph was serving Potiphar. This word for "serve" is from the Hebrew word *תָּשַׁב* which means to "minister, serve" one who is in a higher rank. In Joseph's situation, this would indicate he was of a higher rank than other slaves, yet he was still in a subservient role under the master.⁸ Within this role, the hand of God, which was on Joseph, extended God's blessing to Potiphar's house thereby blessing others in accordance with God's promise to Abraham. A fundamental part of the positive nature of Joseph's work was due to God's involvement in all of his circumstances,⁹ yet Joseph will also stay true to his

⁷ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 380.

⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 460.

⁹ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2005), 732.

understanding of what it means to keep from sinning against God thereby revealing his allegiance to God first and foremost.

Genesis 39 recounts Joseph's time as a slave in Potiphar's house including Joseph's resistance of Potiphar's wife's sexual advances. Even though he was in a foreign land surrounded by people who worshipped false gods, Joseph remained true to his understanding of God's expectations on him. He would not give in to Potiphar's wife's advance and so cross God's established dividing line for sexual purity. While Joseph does state a respect for his master in 39:8-9, the culmination of Joseph's argument appears at the end of verse 9 as he states that giving in to Potiphar's wife would be a "great wickedness" and would be sin against God. As Bruce Waltke states, "though severely tempted, he neither betrays Potiphar's trust in him nor abandons his trust in God."¹⁰ Instead, Joseph retained his personal testimony and maintained his testimony with God.

Joseph was spared execution, which would have been the standard punishment, and some, such as Gordon Wenham, suggest this was due to either the wife insulting Potiphar since Joseph was the one "whom you have brought among us" or due to the fact that Potiphar did not completely believe his wife.¹¹ According to Genesis 39:10, this temptation to sin continued "day after day," yet Joseph remained true to his convictions. His statement and actions reveal that the descendants of Abraham did have an understanding of God's standard for their personal conduct and of God's expectations for how they represented Him through their lives.¹²

Joseph stayed true to his convictions even though he would be falsely accused and sentenced to prison for actions he did not commit. Even though he was sent to prison for

¹⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 524.

¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 376–77.

¹² Mathews, *Genesis*, 726.

something that he did not do, Genesis 39:23 clearly indicates that the Lord was still with him. Taking into account Judah's moral failure in chapter 38 and Joseph's success over temptation in chapter 39, the narrative continues the crescendo of the account through his time in prison until Joseph is standing before Pharaoh in chapter 41. It is from the basis of Joseph's moral character and continued commitment to follow God's ways that he is able to stand before a powerful, pagan leader and declare God to others.¹³

In Genesis 41, Pharaoh was confronted by two disturbing dreams which caused him to seek out his magicians and wise men to provide answers as to the meaning of his dreams, yet Genesis 41:8 states "there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh." These two groups of individuals were tasked with such jobs, but whatever answers they might have given to Pharaoh were unsatisfactory. According to Alex Varughese and Christina Bohn, this failure seems to have lead to anxiety for Pharaoh since he, as the mediator between the gods and the people, was unable to understand the message within the dreams.¹⁴ From this failure of the magicians and wise men, the chief cupbearer remembered his interaction with a Hebrew prisoner who could solve Pharaoh's problem, and the next scene of the Joseph narrative represents the climax of Joseph's account as he stood before mighty Pharaoh and declared the true God who alone can reveal the future.¹⁵ This section stands as the climax as Joseph is given the opportunity to testify of God as the one who truly interprets dreams in verses 16, 25, 28, and 32 with Pharaoh acknowledging that God is the One who revealed the interpretation to Joseph in verse 39. In the

¹³ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 524.

¹⁴ Alex Varughese and Christina Bohn, *Genesis 12-50: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, NBBC (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2019), 311.

¹⁵ Wenham, *Genesis*, 392.

process of interpreting the dreams, Joseph is able to confront the false beliefs of Pharaoh and his court and allows Joseph to be established as a messenger for God.

This chapter reveals some of the explanation concerning how God brought about good from an evil situation as God used Joseph's brothers' wrong action of selling him into slavery to place Joseph before Pharaoh. Because of this situation, Joseph was able to provide an interpretation of the dreams, through the power of God, which enabled Egypt to weather the agricultural crises and to provide food for other nations and peoples including Joseph's own family. In the midst of this taking place, Genesis 41:16 shows Joseph willingly taking a confrontational stance against Pharaoh's false belief that Joseph is the one who can interpret dreams. Gordon Wenham mentions that the Hebrew word used to describe Joseph's reply to Pharaoh in verse 16, *אָנֹכִי*, is confrontational in nature especially when combined with Joseph as the subject and as Pharaoh being the one addressed.¹⁶ In this passage, Joseph is addressing Pharaoh who is considered "a god incarnate," yet Joseph is very willing to declare the God who enables him to interpret a dream which no one else was able to interpret.¹⁷ The way in which Joseph does this signifies his belief in the superiority of his God over the god Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt who empower the wise men and magicians. This action revealed another dividing line for Joseph in that he was compelled to use the opportunities which God provided to declare the superiority of God.

Joseph's declaration of a different God who is able to withhold information from Egyptian leaders is enough to cause Pharaoh to recognize God's direction of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams in Genesis 41:38-39. This recognition of God being at work is a culmination of

¹⁶ Wenham, *Genesis*, 392.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 492.

Joseph's time as a slave in Egypt as now Joseph is able to be a witness for God to the highest levels of human authority in Egypt.¹⁸ In these same verses, Pharaoh elevates Joseph into a very high position of civil power due to his ability to interpret dreams but also due to the reality that the "Spirit of God" is in Joseph as seen in verse 38.

Pharaoh does attempt to conform Joseph to an Egyptian's way of life and incorporate Joseph into the religious structure of Egypt in Genesis 41:42-45. Pharaoh changes Joseph's clothes, changes his name, and marries Joseph into the family of a priest of On. In the narrative account, these changes attempt to reveal "Pharaoh's greater authority" over Joseph as Pharaoh is the one in charge of Joseph's life.¹⁹ These changes could cause readers to wonder whether or not Joseph would remain faithful to God while immersed in a kingdom which worshipped numerous false gods, yet one can see Joseph's commitment to remain faithful to God through the naming of his sons. Both of his sons' names, Manasseh and Ephraim, are Hebrew names which reveal Joseph's focus on God, on the land promised to Abraham's descendants, and his attitude of thankfulness to God's involvement in his life.²⁰ The naming of one's children is significant as it displays one's focus and mentality.

The fact that Joseph chose Hebrew names signifies the connection he still felt with his family in spite of the problems he had with his brothers. He did not choose Egyptian names nor names which included references to the Egyptian gods. Genesis 41:45 shows the forced changes which took place in Joseph's life as his name is changed, he is given the daughter of an influential priest, and he is commissioned into the government as a powerful official. Verse 50 even repeats the fact that his wife is the daughter of a priest of On, yet in spite of these changes

¹⁸ Varughese and Bohn, *Genesis*, 297.

¹⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 534.

²⁰ Wenham, *Genesis*, 398.

in his life, the naming of his children reveals “a faithful Hebrew who is firmly connected to God’s covenant with his family.”²¹

Joseph as an Egyptian Official

Joseph retained a focus on God throughout his time in Egypt as seen through his willingness to boldly declare the origin of Pharaoh’s dreams, the source of Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams, and the naming of his own children. From the start of his time in Egypt resisting the sexual pursuits of Potiphar’s wife to the time of his reunion with his family, Joseph remained a consistent ambassador for God to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The biblical account offers no hint that Joseph began worshipping false gods, but instead, Joseph kept the mindset that God was in control of everything that happened to him.²²

In Genesis 41, Joseph not only provides an interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams while giving all credit to God, but Joseph also offers advice to Pharaoh in Genesis 41:33-36 concerning a way to preserve Egypt during the lean years. Joseph had already shown an interest in helping Pharaoh and his people. In Joseph’s first response to Pharaoh in Genesis 41:16, Joseph appears to have known that God would give Pharaoh *שָׁלוֹם*. This word means “peace” and indicates Joseph’s willingness for God to show Pharaoh the dreams in order for the welfare of Egypt.²³ This viewpoint is reiterated at the end of Genesis as Joseph saw God at work to preserve people through the difficult circumstances initiated by his brothers. This desire to be helpful in the situation can be seen after Joseph finished declaring God’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream.

²¹ Varughese and Bohn, *Genesis*, 319.

²² See Genesis 50:19-21 as Joseph expresses his belief that God had His own divine purpose behind everything that happened to him. Instead of becoming bitter, Joseph embraced his role as being part of God’s plan for both his family and for other nations.

²³ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 382.

Joseph did not remain silent but offered the wisdom he possessed to let Pharaoh know of a potential plan, in Genesis 41:33-36, to avert the disaster of the upcoming famine. He calls on Pharaoh to find “a discerning and wise man” to oversee the storing up of food during the time of plenty to provide for the famine, and this reveals Joseph’s transition from declaring God’s interpretation to someone who is wise in practical ways according to John Skinner.²⁴ Skinner shows how this took place as Joseph offered specific steps to take from appointing overseers to how much crop Egypt should take as a tax during the bountiful years.

Joseph used God’s gift of interpreting dreams to then serve in the governmental structure of Egypt. Joseph’s advice pleased Pharaoh who appointed him as second only to Pharaoh in order to carry out this plan to preserve the people. It is worth noting that Joseph clearly reflected all praise back to God in chapter 41, and the naming of his sons reflects Joseph’s focus on seeing God at work in spite of the difficulties he faced while in Egypt. While he kept the right focus on God, Joseph did not fight against the orders of Pharaoh in the changing of his name, his clothes, or even in the assigned marriage to Asenath. Victor Hamilton mentions the fact that there are no objections in the Bible from Joseph concerning all of the changes enacted upon him by Pharaoh, but it is also worth noting that the rest of the biblical account of Joseph does not utilize the Egyptian name but keeps referring to him as Joseph.²⁵ A change of appearance and a change of name does not require a change of allegiance from God to another god, and in the case of Joseph, he was able to remain focused on God’s sovereignty while serving Pharaoh to the best of his ability.

²⁴ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (New York, NY: Scribner, 1910), 468.

²⁵ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 507.

Joseph also saw no issue with gathering all of the resources of the people of Egypt, except for the priests in Egypt, and enslaving the people of Egypt in the course of fulfilling his role for Pharaoh. Joseph did provide for his own family in this process, but Joseph clearly sought the welfare of Pharaoh as he used the stored resources to keep the people and livestock of Egypt alive.²⁶ Kenneth Mathews mentions the ethical dilemma that modern readers have concerning the outcome of Joseph selling the food back to the people of Egypt at the cost of all of their money, livestock, land, and even themselves. However, he also mentions that this was not too different from debt arrangements during difficult years and the reality that the people did not starve to death.²⁷ Another view concerning Joseph's motivation in practically enslaving the people of Egypt comes from Megan Warner. She sees Joseph's actions as a result of all the trauma that he has received from others, and now, he lashes out at those under his authority.²⁸

Even with the difficulty in the mind of the modern reader, the reality is that Joseph successfully served within his role as an Egyptian official while saving the lives of countless individuals and preserving the his own family. However, the people of Egypt offered themselves and their land as payment in order to live (Genesis 47:19), and the people appear to be grateful for that fact that Joseph's actions saved them from starvation (Genesis 47:25). When taken with the fact that Joseph served both Potiphar and the head of the prison to the best of his ability in spite of the trauma delt to him, the indications in Scripture point to Joseph not acting based on vindictiveness but on a desire to do what is best for those over him. Additionally, the Bible offers no indication that he ever compromised his relationship with God. Instead of compromising his

²⁶ Alan Ross, *Genesis*. In *Genesis, Exodus*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, CBC (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 242.

²⁷ Mathews, *Genesis*, 850–51.

²⁸ Megan Warner, “‘You Shall not do as They do in the Land of Egypt’: Joseph and the Perils of Uber-Assimilation as Response to Involuntary Migration,” *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019): 49.

beliefs, he took a stand to let Pharaoh know what God had done and would do to the land of Egypt.

Lessons from Joseph's Civil Service

Using Genesis 50:19-20 as a basis for understanding Joseph's perspective throughout his time in Egypt, one can see that he did not ultimately lose sight of God being in control of all of his circumstances. He believed that "God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" as he said in verse 20, and this is in spite of the great difficulties he faced to get to this point. The narrative leads up to this conclusion from his time in Potiphar's house. He would not lie with Potiphar's wife and sin against God (Genesis 39:9). Later, he would not take credit for interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, and instead, abruptly turned the attention to God as the source of the dream, the interpretation, and the weather conditions in Genesis 41.

From a human perspective, Egypt would have been doomed to suffer an extreme famine apart from the presence of a follower of God who was used by God to bring about physical salvation from the coming famine.²⁹ Varughese and Bohn focus in on this reality that God used a willing servant to enact His plans for a nation of unbelievers. Yes, Joseph's plan also did save his own family, but it also enabled people from Egypt and other nations to have enough food to survive. It took a follower of God, who properly represented Him to the unbelievers, to take the initiative to do something concerning the coming trouble. Varughese and Bohn continue by saying Joseph's "elevated status from being a slave does not make him forget his God. Instead, he finds God's ongoing involvement in his life" and "the theological reality of God's presence...is what guide the people of faith to go on with their life."³⁰

²⁹ Varughese and Bohn, *Genesis*, 320.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

Joseph embraced the role that he was given by God while serving in a secular government and surrounded by people who worshipped false gods. His service to Pharaoh did not cause him to abandon his understanding of God's expectations for his life, and the forced transformation to look like the Egyptians and marriage into a priest's family did not cause him to worship other gods. Instead, he sought to serve his civil leader to the fullest of his ability while also letting others know of the God he served and who was in control of all circumstances. Joseph stayed true in his primary submission to God by holding the line against sexual sin, maintaining a willingness to declare the greatness of God, and naming his children in such a way as to reflect the faithfulness of God. Joseph kept to his dividing lines in his submission to the Egyptian leader.

Joseph also embraced the reality that God's covenantal promises would be fulfilled, and Joseph kept his gaze on the future day when God would bring his descendants back to the Promised Land. Genesis 49:29-33 shows Jacob's desire for his corpse to be returned to the land of his father's, and the beginning of the next chapter shows this taking place. Joseph has his physicians, a position which was highly religious in nature due to the Egyptian's view of the afterlife, prepare the body of Jacob for transportation back to the land by embalming it.³¹ Joseph and his brothers were able to see this accomplished after the time of mourning was completed. Following this example, Joseph requests this of the "sons of Israel" in Genesis 50:24-26 to bring his body back to the land promised to his family. Once again, this process of embalming in Egypt would have been a very religious experience from the Egyptian perspective, yet the biblical passages relating to bringing Jacob and Joseph back to the land focus upon the very promises of God to their family.

³¹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 692.

As the human instrument who removed the family from the land, Joseph desired for his own corpse to be brought back to the land when God fulfilled His promise to return them. The attention on God's covenantal promises overshadow the religious nature of the Egyptian tradition and focus on God provision and faithfulness.³² Joseph did not lose sight of God while in a foreign nation and surrounded by false worship. He used the resources of the land he was currently in, but he did not adapt to the belief systems of the land. Instead, he clung to the promises of God while faithfully serving in the position that God gave to him as a recognition of the complete sovereignty and kingship of God over earthly leaders such as Pharaoh.

Daniel's Testimony in Babylon

The accounts about Joseph and Daniel include many literary and thematic similarities with each other, and Joshua Philpot shows many of these connections between the two as he highlights the wording used, the characters' actions and roles, and some of the themes which connect the accounts. He sees one of the purposes behind these similarities is to "cause the reader to recall something or someone in the past,"³³ and this specifically relates to readers recalling Joseph's time in Egypt as they read of Daniel's time in Babylon. As Philpot unfolds the many connections between the accounts, he believes that the author of Daniel was very intentional in the making of these ties so as to help the Jewish people after the time of Daniel³⁴ based on the continued themes of God's sovereignty and purpose.³⁵

Joseph and Daniel have very similar situations and functions while serving within a foreign government, and they both display wisdom to modern readers concerning their own

³² Wenham, *Genesis*, 491.

³³ Philpot, "Was Joseph a Type of Daniel?," 687.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 693.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 696.

beliefs about God's expectations for them while they serve as civil servants. Joseph had a few recorded temptations to forsake God's plan for him, and Daniel is going to face even more as he serves the Babylonian Empire and the Persian Empire. Additionally, Daniel's friends are going to have their own confrontation with the king when they are told to worship an idol. The book of Daniel has much to say about Daniel and the others remaining undefiled, yet they will also show deep care for the wellbeing of the empires and for the kings as they primarily submit to God while in a foreign nation.

Daniel's Situation and Mindset

Daniel 1 begins with the situation of the Lord delivering Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar as seen in verse 2. After conquering Judah, Nebuchadnezzar brings some of the best of the people to Babylon in order to assimilate some of the talents represented in the conquered people, and this marks the stage as a foreign nation attempts to coerce the assimilation of the Jewish people into another identity. Barry Jones sees the beginning of Daniel as the start of this contest between the people of God and a heathen nation to see if God's people will be faithful outside of the Promised Land.³⁶ Because of Israel's sin, God used the foreign nation to punish His chosen people, but the book of Daniel will reveal that God's purposes for the people of Israel are not finished.

Right from the beginning, Daniel and his friends are faced with a choice concerning that assimilation into Babylonian culture. These Jewish men are placed under the care of the chief of the eunuchs, but there is some type of problem in Daniel 1:8. Here, Daniel takes a stand against the food and wine offered to him, for he did not want "to defile himself." This phrase about

³⁶ Barry A Jones, "Resisting the Power of Empire: The Theme of Resistance in the Book of Daniel," *Review & Expositor* 109, no. 4 (2012): 552–53.

defiling himself comes from the Hebrew word לִטְמָא , which can carry the connotation of being ceremonially impure or a pollution of a “breach of moral or ceremonial law.”³⁷ Joyce Baldwin suggests that since the Babylonians did not view meats in categories of clean or unclean, as the Jewish people did due to the Law, there could be no guarantee that the meat served to Daniel and his friends would be clean for them. On top of this issue was the fact that there was no guarantee that the blood would be properly drained from the meat, and this would also cause a breach of the Law concerning the food they ate.³⁸ Some have also suggested that all of the food offered to the Hebrews was first offered to the Babylonian gods, and therefore, taking part in the food would be viewed as an act of worship by those who eat the food. However, this would be hard to avoid as most food could have been offered to the idols including the food that Daniel specifically requested.³⁹

John Goldingay attempts to get to the heart of the issue by focusing on the fact that Daniel assumed the food and wine would cause him to be impure based on his understanding of what was right for him to partake of for his nourishment,⁴⁰ and due to the way in which Daniel was written, one must focus on what this chapter is communicating to readers. For Daniel, there was a fundamental understanding of how his adaptation to the Babylonian culture or how he followed the commands of those over him could affect his relationship with God. He could not cross over this dividing line as it would defile him in his relationship with God. Daniel did not fear the Babylonian officials, since he was willing to confront their standard operating procedure,

³⁷ Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 66.

³⁸ Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 91–92.

³⁹ Paul R. House, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 53.

⁴⁰ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 18.

but Daniel did want to accurately present God to those around him as seen in his conversation with Nebuchadnezzar in 2:28 and his friends' attitude in chapter 3. As stated by Stephen Miller, "Daniel's refusal to eat the king's food was based upon his deep religious convictions" when viewing all of Daniel's interactions with the officials in light of Daniel's faithfulness to God.⁴¹

Daniel was surrounded by unbelievers who wanted to change him into a good Babylonian civil servant through the change in his diet and the giving of a Babylonian name, yet Daniel was committed to remain faithful to the commands and nature of God. Sharon Pace makes the observation that, in spite of the heavy pressure to conform to the Babylonian standard, Daniel believed he was able to abide by God's commandments even when in a foreign land, and this is what led him to be inflexible in every aspect of living out his faith in God.⁴² This attitude continued through his time in Babylon, and this attitude is mirrored in his three friends as seen in chapter 3. They lived based on their understandings of what it meant to live for God while also attempting to serve the empire to the fullest of their capabilities. Their first priority was to maintain their submission to God and His ways.

Even in the manner that they sought to remain pure in Daniel 1 reveals hearts which sought to respect those in positions over them. They did not angrily demand different accommodations. Instead, Daniel 1:10-13 shows Daniel offering a compromise so that both sides could get what they wanted. By doing so, Paul House sees their solution would have actually revealed high character and dignity to the situation while also indicating to the Babylonians that they did accept their situation as individuals being trained for civil service.⁴³

⁴¹ Miller, *Daniel*, 67.

⁴² Sharon Pace, *Daniel*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2008), 42.

⁴³ House, *Daniel*, 56.

Daniel neither sought out confrontation, nor did he flee from the challenge of those who would seek to undermine his relationship with God. Instead, his mindset was established on the direct line of submission to God, and if he could maintain that relationship with God, he faithfully fulfilled his role as a governmental official. This dissertation will reveal that this mindset was the basis for his interactions with the kings he served underneath with the clear priority being obedience to God, yet this priority did not detract from his desire to function well as an official. He would not make a scene when he did have to take a stand. From his example, the book of Daniel, with a focus on the first six chapters, will reveal several examples of how Daniel lived his life, and these examples will provide some wise instructions for future generations of God's followers.

Daniel's Understanding of God

As a captive of the Babylonian Empire, Daniel was under the authority of civil leaders who worshipped other gods. In chapter one, Daniel was placed under the care of the chief of the eunuchs and given his daily sustenance, yet Daniel 1:8 reveals Daniel's belief that if he partook of that food and wine he would be defiling himself. The verb, **לִטְמֹא**, is a hithpael imperfect. This indicates that the verb is reflexive as Daniel's action would cause himself to be defiled. This is in spite of the fact that Daniel is under the authority of the Babylonians. He believed that he was still accountable for his own actions to the Lord.

Daniel also appeared to accept the fact that God was behind everything that happened to him. It was God who delivered Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hands, and it was God who delivered Daniel to be used as an official in the Babylonian Empire. From the time that Daniel delivered God's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream until the end of the book, Daniel embraced the situation in which God had placed him and served faithfully. As Iain Duguid points

out, Daniel took to heart Jeremiah's instruction in Jeremiah 29:4-7 to be a good citizen in the city God had placed him. In this role, Daniel would be able to testify about God to those he interacted with as he served Babylon.⁴⁴

With this in mind, Daniel sought to use his role as both an interpreter of dreams and governmental official to declare God to others. The priority was always on serving God, and this can be seen in Daniel 2 when he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar to both reveal and interpret his dream. Daniel points out to him in verses 27-28 the insufficiencies of those who had originally been tasked with the job, but Daniel is able to speak on behalf of God in heaven. These statements reveal a clashing of worldviews and a challenge against the gods of the Babylonian Empire. Iain Duguid also indicates that the servants of the false gods claimed to be able to interpret dreams, and this is contrasted with the God of Daniel who alone is in control of the future.⁴⁵

Daniel displayed complete confidence in God as he testified of God before Nebuchadnezzar. He did not view Nebuchadnezzar as all-powerful but as a pawn in God's hands to do with as He saw fit. Daniel 2:37-38 tells of Daniel's overt statement concerning this as Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God was the One who gave the nations into his hands. This message of God's supremacy culminates in verses 44-45 as God destroys the nations of the world to establish His eternal kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have understood some of Daniel's message in the last four verses of Daniel 2 as he heaps rewards and worship on Daniel, but Sharon Pace acknowledges the absurdity of the king's praise since he was the one who destroyed the temple of God and still worships other gods.⁴⁶ In spite of Nebuchadnezzar's

⁴⁴ Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, REC (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2008), 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁴⁶ Pace, *Daniel*, 77.

inability to properly see God, Daniel used terminology to indicate the superiority of God as well as the fact that only God was able to tell the king the dream with the interpretation.⁴⁷ Once again, Daniel's actions reveal his belief in the supremacy of God and the need to primarily submit to God.

Under the rule of Darius in Daniel 6, some other officials convince Darius to make it illegal to petition any other god or person other than Darius (Daniel 6:6-9). As Daniel 6:10 explains, Daniel fully knew of the law signed by Darius, yet he continued with his habit of praying to God three times a day while facing Jerusalem. This action of praying towards Jerusalem appears to come from Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:46-53. Here, Solomon mentions the possibility of God removing the people from the land due to their sin, yet there is hope of being restored to the land if the people repent wholeheartedly as "they pray to you toward their land...the city that you have chosen" (1 Kings 8:48). Even though Jerusalem remained in its destroyed state due to Nebuchadnezzar's war, Daniel revealed his faith in the Lord that His promises would lead to the restoration of the city as God was the one who controlled the situation completely.⁴⁸ Daniel's commitment to this regular time of prayer showed others that he was focused upon his relationship with God even at the cost of his life.

His faith had apparently been a very public expression of devotion to God during his time in Babylon, and the threat of persecution did not hinder his normal, public display of devotion to God. Stephen Miller sees this episode as a confirmation concerning Daniel's primary allegiance and the reality that he would not compromise actions which he believed were righteous. Daniel's faith was an open faith on display for others to observe, and no threat of punishment would deter

⁴⁷ Eugene Carpenter, "Daniel", in *Ezekiel, Daniel*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, CBC (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 367.

⁴⁸ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 143.

Daniel's faith.⁴⁹ Based on Daniel's own understanding of what he knew about God, he would not act in such a way which would undermine the nature and superiority of God. Just as he was willing to confront Nebuchadnezzar's belief in false gods, Daniel was willing to depend on God for direction in life and would not be persuaded to change based on man's whims.

Daniel as an Official in Babylon

From the time of his appointment as an official of Babylon at the end of Daniel 2, Daniel functioned as a leader in the empire and continued to do so even after the fall of the Babylonian Empire under Darius. At the end of chapter 2, Daniel is able to secure appointments for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three men will also show the same type of commitment to obeying the Lord as Daniel displayed in the first two chapters. Daniel 3 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's construction of a large image of gold which he commanded those in attendance to bow down and worship.

This chapter does not mention Daniel, and there have been several attempts to explain the lack of Daniel's presence in Daniel 3. Stephen Miller offers a couple of ideas as to where Daniel was during this event. He offers the possibility that Daniel was governing Babylon while the king and other officials were at this event. Regardless of the reason, the character of Daniel displayed in this book indicates that Daniel would have also refused to worship an idol.⁵⁰ There could be other reasons such as the fact that Daniel 2 ends with Nebuchadnezzar's praise of Daniel and his God. With this level of praise, it would be possible that Nebuchadnezzar purposefully excused Daniel from attending the event in the next chapter or sent Daniel on a mission which would have resulted in him missing out on the activity. Based on the actions of

⁴⁹ Miller, *Daniel*, 179.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

chapter two, it could be assumed that the king was involved in getting Daniel out of attending the false worship, but that protection, if present, did not appear to transfer to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they had to publicly refuse the order to worship this image.

After these three individuals did not bow down to the idol, Daniel 3:14-15 tells of the king offering these three another chance to properly obey his command to worship the image, yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond by stating there is no need for another chance since they will not bow to the idol and let their actions primarily speak for them.⁵¹ Worship of a false god represented their own dividing line which they could not cross, for worship of anyone other than God would have attacked their own direct line of submission to God. They revealed their trust in their God even if their submission to God resulted in their death. In their response to the king, Paul House sees only respect in their answer to the king as they brush aside any reasonable excuse for not bowing but embrace the reality of their decision.⁵² There is no indication that these three were chaffing under the general authority of Nebuchadnezzar, but they were clear that the king had no right to usurp worship of God alone. This same issue of worship will come into play in chapter 6, and again, there will be no room for compromise when God's followers are told to worship anything or anyone other than God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted in God's ability to deliver them from the furnace, but they were also willing to die in order to keep themselves from sinning against God by worshipping something else. Through a miracle, God did deliver them while also providing them company within the furnace. Because of this deliverance, Daniel 3:26-30 reveals Nebuchadnezzar's astonishment and the testimony of God provided by God's deliverance of

⁵¹ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 72.

⁵² House, *Daniel*, 83.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Goldingay mentions the irony that God's power quenched Nebuchadnezzar's fire of vengeance through preserving His followers.⁵³ While it is important to see the faithfulness of these three men, the conclusion of this episode is the astounding power of God which was displayed before all of the Babylonian officials.⁵⁴ God used these three men's testimony to declare Himself to a large group of individuals who saw Him triumph over the plans of their king and idol. From a human perspective, these three servants of God caused the elite of Babylon to witness God's display of greatness due to their willingness to follow God's commands. From a human perspective, this display of God's greatness only happened due to their commitment to submit to God in all aspects of life even if that submission required them to disobey their king's edict. These actions would be highlighted while they had served as officials and continued to do so even after this confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar. They remained subservient to the king while rightfully refusing to obey an order which went against God's teachings concerning worship.

The narrative returns back to Daniel's interactions with Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. In this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, and this one made him afraid. In response to that fear, he summoned "the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers," but they once again failed to be able to interpret his dream (Daniel 4:7). Daniel seems to have been the last one to come to the king, and the king is glad to have Daniel who is set apart from the rest of the wise men of the court. Nebuchadnezzar uses the phrase רִיבֵי אֱלֹהִים קְדִישִׁים to indicate the unique role Daniel plays as the "Spirit of the holy gods" dwells in him, and this statement signifies the idea of Daniel possessing the true Spirit of God from the perspective of the king.⁵⁵ Whether or

⁵³ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 75.

⁵⁴ House, *Daniel*, 86.

⁵⁵ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 87.

not this is an indication that Nebuchadnezzar admits Daniel's God as the One who dwells in him, the interpretation of the dream does indicate that the king does not worship God since the dream was a warning concerning Nebuchadnezzar's focus on himself instead of God, yet he clearly understands the uniqueness of Daniel's ability to interpret dreams as he contrasts Daniel, whom he calls Belteshazzar after the king's god, with the inability of his wise men who were unable to fulfill the king's wish for an interpretation (Daniel 4:18).

After the king's request for an interpretation, Daniel was bothered by what he found out about the meaning of the dream. This was so obvious that Nebuchadnezzar had to coax him to reveal what he knew. Apparently, Daniel truly cared for Nebuchadnezzar and did not want the interpretation of the dream to come true, for that would mean the king would receive a severe punishment from God. At the end of Daniel 4:19, he even states his wish for the dream to be for the king's enemies instead of for Nebuchadnezzar. This response reveals Daniel's desire for the wellbeing of the king and the kingdom as he did not wish for the king to suffer the soon to come consequences for his arrogance. Paul House even goes so far as to say that Daniel's response shows love for Nebuchadnezzar from the perspective of a faithful civil official to his king.⁵⁶ Stephen Miller adds the observation that the care for the king might also extend to being care for Daniel's fellow Jews since Nebuchadnezzar had elevated several Jews to high positions.⁵⁷ Even if that was part of Daniel's reasoning, his initial response still showed deep concern for his king in spite of the fact that the king still did not serve God. Additionally, Daniel 4:27 adds to this topic as Daniel makes a plea to the king to change his ways. Miller notes that, undergirding Daniel's plea to the king, there is a "genuine possibility of foregoing this judgment" which was

⁵⁶ House, *Daniel*, 96.

⁵⁷ Miller, *Daniel*, 136.

announced through the dream.⁵⁸ Daniel's understanding of the nature of God led him to believe that forgiveness was possible, and the forgiveness could come with an alleviation of the punishment foretold in the dream.

Daniel wanted the king, and by inference, the kingdom to prosper, so Daniel sought to use his influence to guide the king in the right way. This interaction in Daniel 4:27 can be seen as a subtle switch from Daniel acting as a basic interpreter to acting as "a moral instructor of and witness to the great king."⁵⁹ Daniel did not hide the truth about God's intention for the king, and Daniel did not shy away from offering advice concerning the king's own relationship with God. He had to speak out as God directed him, and as before when he gave testimony of God in the previous situation, Daniel's primary submission to God required him to speak truth to the situation. Daniel used his civil position to make known the will of God and to offer instruction about God. He cared for the king, and this care led to a call for Nebuchadnezzar to "break off" his sins to God and, instead, live within the righteousness of God as exemplified by Daniel.

In Daniel 6, Daniel is one of three high officials in charge of one hundred twenty satraps for Darius as Daniel survived the transition of power and maintained a position of authority in the new government in Babylon, and Daniel 6:3 says "Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom." Stephen Miller theorizes that Darius had heard of Daniel's work, possibly including the episode with the writing on the wall, and wanted this capable administrator to work for him now.⁶⁰ This king is Darius who took over Babylon after the

⁵⁸ Miller, *Daniel*, 139.

⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann, "At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (1991): 14.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Daniel*, 178.

Babylonian Empire fell to the Medes and Persians. In spite of the transfer of power, Daniel still distinguished himself as someone of high character and capabilities. Because of the distinguished position he was in, some of the other officials sought to lower his status, but they could not find anything worthy of remark against him. Because of this, they convinced Darius to create a law concerning prayer which they would have known would put Daniel at odds with the law, for they knew his habit of prayer to his God (Daniel 6:10).⁶¹ The law was specifically created to get Daniel in trouble and condemn him to death. They knew his character would not let him suddenly change his behavior of worship to his God.

Daniel 6:10 takes place with Daniel fully knowing that the law was signed, yet he was still committed to public prayer to God. In this, he did break the law, but Paul House makes a distinction concerning the purpose and manner that Daniel broke the law. He writes, “he did not break the thirty-day law because of a rebellious spirit or a desire to hurt the king. His obedience to God did not preclude loyal service to his ruler.”⁶² Daniel obeyed and served his civil leader to the best of his ability, but Daniel clearly owed his allegiance to God. This has, in the book of Daniel, always been his dividing line. He would only worship God and would obey God’s commands regardless of the consequences for doing so. When these two areas of life were in conflict between service to God and service to one’s authority, Daniel consistently made the choice to follow God. In this situation, God divinely orchestrated the preservation of Daniel’s life and the destruction of those who sought Daniel’s downfall, yet Daniel’s obedience does not appear to be based upon knowledge of God’s future deliverance but based upon what was right to do in the first place. This was his practice from the very beginning of his time in Babylon. He

⁶¹ House, *Daniel*, 119.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 126.

sought to obey his leaders whenever it was possible to do so while staying faithful to God, yet when he was commanded to do something which would hurt his relationship with God, he refused to accommodate that command.

In the morning after Daniel entered the pit, both Darius and Daniel acknowledge that salvation came by the means of Daniel's God, and this is another time in which Daniel is able to have a clear testimony about the superiority and sovereignty of God due to his faithfulness in service to God. Darius witnessed a great miracle from God for His servant, and this caused Darius to give praise to Daniel's God.⁶³ For Daniel personally, Daniel 6:28 mentions that Daniel continued to prosper and to serve under the Persians. God honored Daniel with a long, prosperous time of service as he represented God to those around him.

Lessons from Daniel's Civil Service

Daniel's career in Babylon spanned multiple decades and the transfer of power from the Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians. He served these empires in spite of the fact that the Babylonians took him from his home, destroyed the temple of God, and forced him to enter civil service. Through all of these circumstances, Daniel maintained trust in God's plan for himself, Israel, and the nations of the world. He sought to use his role within the governments to represent God. Joe Sprinkle sees the theological focus for God's followers that they should be willing to remain set apart for service to Him while being open about their faith. This openness about God is to be maintained even at the cost of one's own wellbeing or life. God can save His people, yet he does not have to save them. Instead of focusing on one's own future, God's people must remain dedicated to the ways of God even if that puts them at odds with their government.⁶⁴

⁶³ Miller, *Daniel*, 189.

⁶⁴ Joe Sprinkle, *Daniel*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 164–65.

Daniel was consistently unwilling to compromise his walk with God to follow the desires of his king. He did see the kings he served as being in their positions due to God's direct hand, but that did not give them the right to cause people to sin against God. As seen in Daniel 4, no one can escape God's control, and God can use even the dreams of a pagan king to accomplish His plans for the nations.⁶⁵ God's followers must keep a focus on God's sovereignty, even while among foreign nations or under the authority of pagans, and they must seek to speak and live based on God's nature and commands.⁶⁶ Allegiance is owed to God, and primary submission is to God. God is the one who established all kingdoms, and He is also the one who places people into their positions. This is why God's people are to serve to the best of their abilities when in positions of civil service, for it is God who placed them there for His purposes.

Daniel could have chosen to refuse to serve Babylon or to respond to their demands with an antagonistic disposition, yet he sought compromises when he could and stood upon the solid foundation of God's nature and Word when there was an unavoidable conflict between the earthly king and God's commands. He would not cross his theological dividing lines which would have affected his relationship with God. Daniel established an example of exemplary service, yet his focus was not on how he served his leaders but on his testimony of God while he served. Even though his civil service was secondary, he was still able to consistently be raised to the top of administrators while living so righteously that "his enemies could find nothing to use against him, even when they searched diligently for it."⁶⁷

Joseph and Daniel have similar accounts as to their positions and to the righteous quality of their lives. They served within foreign governments while speaking boldly about the ways of

⁶⁵ House, *Daniel*, 88.

⁶⁶ Brueggemann, "At the Mercy of Babylon," 17.

⁶⁷ Duguid, *Daniel*, 92.

the one true God. God purposefully placed them into their positions, and they used their influences to preserve people's lives, rule well, and represent God to others. In many ways, Nehemiah follows in this same pattern as God's people were under the authority of another power, and the Jewish people were presented with the challenge to remain pure while surrounded by pagans and a culture inundated with pagan rituals. Nehemiah walked a fine line between loyalty to the Persian throne and dedication to the needs of Jerusalem and the Jewish people.⁶⁸ Ultimately, he revealed his focus on following the Law of the Lord as he operated as a faithful governor under Persian leadership. In this role, he called for the people to follow the Lord's ways while using the political authority he was given, through the Lord's sovereignty, to accomplish the purpose of the Lord for Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's Testimony as a Governor in Jerusalem

The book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the historical account begun in Ezra. As such, the book reveals the efforts of Nehemiah to continue improving the city after Ezra's religious reforms. The people in Jerusalem had made progress, yet the city and the people needed a great deal of work to better align with God's ways. In Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah learns of Jerusalem's wall's great need to be repaired. The report from Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, and others from Jerusalem greatly affected Nehemiah due to the trouble in Jerusalem. He would have known about some of the political difficulties mentioned in Ezra, and his plea to the Lord at the end of Nehemiah was for the Lord to open the means to accomplish what needs to be done for the people in Jerusalem to properly represent God. As David Shepherd and Christopher Wright mention, Nehemiah was seeking the Lord's help to provide a "reversal of the previously

⁶⁸ David Janzen, "A Colonized People: Persian Hegemony, Hybridity, and Community Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah," *Biblical Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2016): 29.

obstructive policy” that the book of Ezra mentions.⁶⁹ Even though the people had secured permission from the government during the book of Ezra, they kept having to fight to continue on with the work due to opposition from those around them.

After Nehemiah’s prayer, the first chapter concludes with a vital piece of information about Nehemiah, he was “cupbearer to the king.” As cupbearer, Nehemiah held an important position as both an advisor to the king but also as one who helped protect the king from assassination through poisoning. This was especially important to Artaxerxes 1 since his dad had been assassinated.⁷⁰ Nehemiah was on the front line to help protect the king while also provided advise to the king. The next chapter will reveal that he is willing to use his interactions with the king to help his people in their ancestral home, yet there is the potential that Nehemiah’s goals with helping Jerusalem would also benefit the empire. F. Charles Fensham suggests that the instability of the Persian Empire at this time would have motivated the king to be willing to send a trusted advisor to the area of Jerusalem.⁷¹

When confronted with the king’s question concerning his sad expression, Nehemiah’s commitment to prayer and to planning for the welfare of Jerusalem is made evident when, in chapter 2, Nehemiah was given the opportunity to present his case to the king. He was able to provide the king with a complete list of needs for his trip and goals. Nehemiah left the king with the authorization from the throne for the journey and supplies for the work, yet his focus will be on strengthening the remnant of the Jews and their relationship with God. With this in mind of

⁶⁹ David J. Shepherd and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, THOTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 51.

⁷⁰ Joseph Too Shao and Rosa Ching Shao, *Ezra and Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019), 111.

⁷¹ Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 149–50.

Nehemiah functioning as both an agent for the king to the area and as God's chosen servant to repair Jerusalem, one will be able to see how Nehemiah remains faithful to his role as governor and also remains true to his ultimate submission to the ways of God as both tasks aligned for the mutual benefit of the king and for the people of Israel.

Nehemiah as the Governor of Jerusalem

Nehemiah 2 reveals the scene when Nehemiah was before King Artaxerxes and was, for the first time, visibly showing sadness or trouble in front of the king. As the cupbearer, Nehemiah's troubled face could spell trouble for the king or kingdom.⁷² Upon being questioned concerning his troubled expression, Nehemiah makes a plea to his ancestral home's state of disrepair. This statement implies that something must be done and that Nehemiah's own mind was focused on this task. Hence, the king asks what Nehemiah is requesting by making this statement.

The end of Nehemiah 2:5 reveals Nehemiah's focus as he takes some time, however brief, to pray to "the God of heaven." This title for God and the fact that Nehemiah sought God's will first signifies Nehemiah's belief as to who truly was in control of the situation as the king's heart rested in the hands of God.⁷³ Nehemiah's quick prayer to God reveals his primary allegiance and submission is to the will of God and not to the will of the king. After the prayer, Nehemiah responds to the king with specific requests. He needs to be sent by the king to build up the city of his "father's graves," to obtain permission to travel, and to harvest enough lumber for his various tasks. The king clearly had authority over these types of decisions, and Nehemiah would not be able to accomplish his tasks without the king's blessing. While he felt God's hand

⁷² Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988), 213–14.

⁷³ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 161.

was involved in his own desire to rebuild Jerusalem, he also sought permission from his king to accomplish this task by using his office to gain access to the king.⁷⁴ This is another indication of Nehemiah's view of God and His control over the nations. If God truly desires for Jerusalem to be built up, God would direct the king's heart to accomplish this task through Nehemiah.

This dual aspect of the permission Nehemiah sought revealed two beliefs which guided his actions. First, Nehemiah primarily needed God's favor and blessing on his actions. This is revealed in chapter one in Nehemiah's lengthy prayer to God as he confessed sin, reminded God of His promises, and spoke of his desires to restore Jerusalem for the sake of God's name. Nehemiah's prayer in chapter two confirms this priority in the brief statement about his prayer to the God of heaven. Secondly, Nehemiah also felt the need for the king's approval and letters of permission to accomplish this task in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a high ranking civil servant who could not just abandon his position but could use his access to the king to accomplish this goal. Since he was such an influential official, many commentaries, like Fensham's work, suggest that the added benefit of the king's cupbearer being a governor in a troubled area could have been an added benefit to the king.⁷⁵ Thus, Nehemiah was, primarily, looking out for the interests of God but was also, secondarily, interested in furthering the goals of his earthly king.

Part of the narrative in Nehemiah involves the conflict that the surrounding leaders instigated against the projects that Nehemiah seeks to accomplish. Joseph Blenkinsopp mentions that the regional politics would have been upended by Nehemiah's sudden appointment to a position of "considerable authority" and could have caused other regional leaders to push against Nehemiah's sudden rise in the area.⁷⁶ Nehemiah entered into the area with clear orders from the

⁷⁴ Shao and Shao, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 115.

⁷⁵ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 163.

⁷⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 214.

king for a wide range of authority in Jerusalem but also for his own travel and for the gathering of supplies for the task at hand. Nehemiah was constantly challenged by his political antagonists to become distracted from his tasks, yet he was able to remain focused on the mission that God had given to him and on managing Jerusalem for his king.

The most serious political challenge against Nehemiah came in Nehemiah 6. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gesham first sought to remove Nehemiah from Jerusalem through trickery. When this did not work the first four times these individuals tried this tactic, Sanballat sent an open letter accusing Nehemiah of instigating rebellion and establishing himself as a messianic type of king in Jerusalem. The fact that this letter was open means that anyone had access to Sanballat's accusation, and this open letter would automatically place a large spotlight upon Nehemiah regardless of the amount of proof present.⁷⁷ H. G. M. Williamson sees the wording used in Nehemiah 6 as a reference back to a similar accusation leveled against those in Jerusalem from Ezra 4:7-16. Sanballat was attempting to use scare tactics to divert Nehemiah from the work in Jerusalem while at the same time attacking his core motivations.⁷⁸ The political fight raged against Nehemiah and the work he sought to accomplish to restore the city for the name of the Lord. The battle was both a political and religious one, and Nehemiah revealed a dependency on the Lord to guide them through the situation. Nehemiah also revealed wisdom through his own personal conduct as he maintained a lifestyle that was focused on fulfilling God's mission for him.

Nehemiah's response to the open letter is both brief and dismissive of Sanballat's fear tactics against the work of the Lord. Nehemiah stresses that the rumors were Sanballat's own

⁷⁷ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1985), 255.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

creation with the goal of stopping the work, and Nehemiah 6:1-9 closes with another brief prayer seeking God's support for the work revealing his dependency on God. He was not willing to be intimidated enough to stop the work that both God and the king had commissioned him to accomplish and sought to strengthen his hands as opposed to the enemies' goal of his hands dropping the work.⁷⁹ In spite of the many attempts to get Nehemiah to waiver in his commitment to his tasks, Nehemiah shows his dependency on God as the One who instigated this work. Coupled with this dependency on God is a confidence also in the political permission that he had already attained before starting these tasks. When the king asked him what he wanted to do to remedy the situation in Jerusalem, he was prepared with a detailed list of permissions he needed.

As the cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah had secured the political position of being the governor in Jerusalem. According to Nehemiah 5:14, he held this position for at least twelve years which could have been part of the original timing established in Nehemiah 2:6 when the king questioned how long Nehemiah would be gone and when he would return. If his time as governor was continuous, he would have been gone from his duties as cupbearer for a considerable length of time. To be charged with rebellion as someone who held such a high position was a severe accusation. As Charles Fensham reveals from his understanding of Persian history, the king's counselors did sometimes lead rebellions against the king, so any accusation of rebellion against a high official was indeed a serious charge which would be investigated.⁸⁰ However, the charge against Nehemiah appears to have gained no headway in the king's eyes. Nehemiah 13:6 mentions the fact that Nehemiah had returned to the king before again gaining permission to return to Jerusalem. The fact that he was able to stand before Artaxerxes and leave

⁷⁹ Shepherd and Wright, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 75.

⁸⁰ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 201–2.

freely suggests a continued positive relationship with the king. In other words, Nehemiah conducted himself in his role as governor to the satisfaction of the king. He was able to advance the political standing and importance of Jerusalem as well as work towards the spiritual renewal of the people of Jerusalem.

Lessons from Nehemiah's Civil Service

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah continually refer back to the power of the Persian throne as the Jewish leaders seek permission from the kings to accomplish certain tasks, and the enemies of Israel kept accusing those in Jerusalem of acting in rebellion against Persia. Nehemiah is clear that the ultimate authority for everything which takes place in this book does not reside within the earthly throne but within the heavenly throne of God. Nehemiah's submission to God directed his interactions with earthly leaders. The Persians believed that their king ruled the world, yet Nehemiah emphasizes the "God of heaven" had favor on His followers.⁸¹ Some passages in Nehemiah, such as Nehemiah 2:4, seem to mock the false high claims of the Persians as the Bible clearly states the divine domain of God through His names like "God of heaven" to whom Nehemiah takes the time to pray to before speaking to the king.

The human kings appear to act on their own as they treat the Jewish people with favor and hand them permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city,⁸² yet Nehemiah 2:8 declares "the king granted me what I asked, for *the good hand of my God was upon me* [emphasis added]." Ultimately, God is the One who accomplished His goals through whomever He decides to use. Nehemiah teaches that civil authority is not the supreme authority which exists in the world but is subservient to the will of God.

⁸¹ Janzen, "A Colonized People," 32.

⁸² Ibid., 34.

Nehemiah also follows in the same vein as Joseph and Daniel in that he uses his abilities as a wise administrator to service his earthly king. He had a passion to help the people of God to be more firmly rooted in Jerusalem, yet his concern was not primarily on the political role of Jerusalem but doing his part to gather the people of God back to the Promised Land and return them to a right worship of God.⁸³ To accomplish this, he used his political influence and connections to gain permission to fulfill God's role for him, yet in his focus on serving God, he did not neglect his role as governor nor shun his duties as the king's cupbearer. Instead, he returned to the king's side and maintained a right enough relationship with the king to be able to return back to Jerusalem once again.

Nehemiah lived in a balance of serving the earthly kingdom in which he resided and serving God within that political service. Nehemiah revealed his priority of submitting to God's will for His life and trusting God to work through him as he maintained his primary dependency on God. His dividing line was focused on not becoming distracted by the cares of this life or the political intrigues which could have robbed his time. Instead, he remained true to God's task for him.

Cumulative Lessons from Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah

Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah all revealed a God-oriented focus while employing all of their talents and abilities to serve the kingdoms in which God had placed them. They did not serve godly kings, yet they embraced the sovereignty of God for their circumstances. They established the trajectory continued in the New Testament of God's followers who used their difficult circumstances to be a testimony of God to others. Because of their situations, they faced

⁸³ See Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1:5-11 as an example of his focus for his work in Jerusalem.

several conflicts of interests between their relationships with God and the religious nature of some of their kings' demands, yet they were unwilling to compromise their relationships with God in order to appease their civil leaders.

Added to these examples is the instruction given by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:7 to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” He wrote this, around 597 BC, to those who were already exiled in Jerusalem to provide additional instruction to those exiled that God was still involved in their lives.⁸⁴ This message was to show those in exile that their exile was not due to the supremacy of Nebuchadnezzar nor his gods but due to the plan of God. As part of God’s plan, they were to have children and invest in the city that God has placed them, for as the city prospers, the Jewish people will prosper as well.⁸⁵ God transplanted many of His people into a foreign city, and they were to be as committed to seeing Babylon prosper as they sought the prosperity of Jerusalem. In this, Steven Smith sees an echo of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all nations as the Jewish people were dispersed out from their homeland.⁸⁶ This does not include just financial wellbeing but also includes that fact that now God-fearers were in the city to tell others about God.

Also in the midst of this instruction to the Jews in exile was a confirmation of the prophecy that Jeremiah made concerning the length of their exile. Jeremiah 25:11 mentions that they will be in Babylon for seventy years before the Lord punishes Babylon for their sins. Then

⁸⁴ Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 218.

⁸⁵ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1993), 253.

⁸⁶ Steven Smith, *Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah, Lamentations*, CCE (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2019), 178.

in Jeremiah 29:10-14, he mentions that the Lord will bring them back to their land. When viewing Jeremiah's writings, one can see God's plan of salvation for the Jewish people and also the promise concerning a restoration of their relationship with God. Babylon was not in charge of the people of Israel. God was and is the King over all of the earth, so their submission should be to King God as they embrace their role within Babylon as ordained by God.⁸⁷ These men from the Bible's historical accounts revealed practical ways in which they embraced the reality of God's supremacy over all of the kingdoms of the earth. Their first priority was to submit to God, and if they were also able to obey their civil leaders and not cross their dividing lines which would have hindered their relationships with God, they fully served their earthly rulers since it was God who placed them into those positions.

Joseph was taken from his family and placed, by God, into the realm of the Egyptians. Daniel was captured during Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, and Nehemiah grew up within the political exile of his people under both the Babylonians and Persians. All three acknowledged the sovereignty of their new civil leaders.⁸⁸ While they resided in foreign nations, they did not lose sight of their primary submission to God. They did not lose their identity as the people of God or their role to represent God through living according to His laws and nature. Instead, they each had clear dividing lines which helped maintain their own walks with God as their direct submission to God caused them to submit to earthly leaders as long as they were not commanded to go against God's laws or nature or were prohibited from performing the commands of God.

⁸⁷ James Hamilton Jr, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 220.

⁸⁸ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2001), 17. McClain makes the case for a biblical understanding of kingdom to include: a leader, an area governed, and the function of rule over a people. Using this definition, to be removed from one area and placed into another area is to be placed under the earthly dominion of that new kingdom.

Part of what it means to submit to God as the supreme King requires one to embrace the civil structure He has established on the earth. God's followers may be forcibly moved to another kingdom or nation, and when this happens, the Old Testament examples indicate that one's earthly allegiance shifts to that new government. This is due to one's complete submission to God which requires one to check civil commands against the nature and commandments of God since God is the supreme Ruler. From these Old Testament examples, one can then better understand the New Testament passages on one's relationship with the government since the New Testament authors were writing as a continuation of the previous revelation. One will see the overarching priority of complete submission to God, and this priority of submission is what both motivates believers towards civil obedience and permits disobedience when a government attempts to usurp the role of God.

New Testament Exegesis

With the arrival of Jesus into the world, God provided the New Testament as He inspired authors to communicate His message through them. Additionally, the New Testament explained the creation of the church as well as its role while waiting for the return of Jesus to redeem believers to Himself. This New Testament is built upon the information in the Old Testament as God's redemptive narrative continues throughout human history. In this redemptive plan, God has expectations for His people as they represent Him in their various walks of life, and God's expectations include Christians' interactions with civil governments as believers represent Him in all aspects of life. When the New Testament authors wrote on this topic, they wrote in agreement with the previous revelation given by God, and the New Testament authors further explained how Christians are to view their God-ordained governments in their ultimate submission to God Himself.

This continuation of the Scriptures means that the New Testament was written in such a way as to agree with what was said in the Old Testament while it is also applying God's truth to the church's situation after the coming of the Messiah. The motivation behind how one interacts with the government must be based upon the transforming power of the Spirit who changes one's purposes and motivations in life to align with God.¹ Also, the command to submit to one's government comes with the same considerations that those in the Old Testament had to work out concerning whether or not obedience to the government would align with or fight against the ways of God. To see the overall intent of the biblical authors on this topic, one must take into

¹ See Romans 12:1-2 as an example which leads up to the passage on government, Romans 13:1-7.

consideration both the positive commands, such as in Romans 13:1-7, and the exceptions, as in Acts 5:29, to form a cohesive biblical theology of submission to one's civil government.

Obey God or Man?

Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 will be the focus of this chapter as these passages reveal a deeper level of instruction for how Christians are to view and interact with civil governments, yet Acts 5:29 also reveals another aspect to this discussion as the Apostles tell the Sanhedrin that “we must obey God rather than men.” In this section of Acts, the Apostles were charged with the crime of teaching the name of Jesus after having been instructed to keep from this activity by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin were given the responsibility of governing the religious activities in Jerusalem as well as the political issues which were too minor for the Roman authorities.² In this capacity as delegated by the Romans, the Sanhedrin did not have complete civil authority over those in Jerusalem, but they used what authority they did possess to tell the Apostles to not teach about Jesus. However, Acts 5:28 indicates that the Apostles continued to declare the name of Jesus and even accused the Sanhedrin of murdering Jesus.

When confronted by the high priest, Peter answered with a statement that declares they serve a higher power than the Sanhedrin. They serve God Himself, and Peter's dividing line in this passage was the necessity to follow Jesus' command to take His message to the world. David Peterson sees significance in the manner in which Peter responded to the Sanhedrin. They did not resist being forced in front of the Sanhedrin nor disregard the authority of the council.³

² Darrell Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 245.

³ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 220.

They embraced the reality that the Sanhedrin possessed authority to inquire after their activities. Additionally, Ben Witherington points out that the Apostles did not shy away from the truth that they did disobey these authorities, but instead, they readily embraced the charge against them.⁴ They knew they disobeyed their civil authority, yet they did so in order to obey the higher authority.

In his response, Peter also took the opportunity to give testimony to the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus' resurrection and ascension. They used this trial to continue to bear witness as God had instructed them, and Peter culminated his speech in Acts 5:32. Here, he refers to the fact that they were witnesses to what Jesus had done and that the Holy Spirit also testifies of these things, and the Holy Spirit was given by God "to those who obey him." Even this statement is a further affirmation of what had taken place at Pentecost because of the direct work of Jesus.⁵ Peter indicated the involvement of the full, triune God in their commissioning to declare the testimony of Jesus Christ. They were serving under the direct commission of the "divine witness" who lived in them.⁶ Because of this higher calling which came directly from God, they were able to reject the instructions from the civil authorities, since their instructions sought to hinder the commands of God to the Apostles, and embrace the role that God had given them.

Acts 5:29 has been used throughout church history as the basis for disobeying civil laws which Christians believe go against their beliefs or practices. This passage has also been part of the battleground for times when Christians are displeased with civil laws in order to reject those laws when they see a conflict between spheres of life, but before one should use this passage as a

⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles : A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 231.

⁵ William Larkin, *Acts*, in *Luke & Acts*, CBC (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 421.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Books of the Acts*, Revised, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 113.

defense for one's civil disobedience, one must see this passage in light of the greater narrative arc of Scripture. As previously stated, the New Testament instruction is based upon previously given revelation, so both the Old and New Testaments must be consulted to form a cohesive biblical theology of believers' interactions with civil government. The positive statement of "submit to civil authorities" must be understood before defining the situations in which Christians should reject the authority of the civil government due to a conflict with the commands or nature of God. The biblical foundation for submission to one's government must first be laid, and this should only be done once one sees the trajectory of teaching which was already given in the Old Testament. One must primarily submit to God, and if one is able to maintain that submission to God, a believer then submits to God's delegated authorities on earth. Three key Old Testament examples have already been viewed, so now the New Testament must be used as it continues the development of this topic with the starting point of first understanding the meaning of submission found in the Greek word ὑποτάσσω.

The Meaning of ὑποτάσσω

Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13 both contain the word ὑποτάσσω which is translated as "submit." This word is also found in Ephesians 5:21 where Paul calls on the believers to be "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." ὑποτάσσω comes from Greek word τάγμα and indicates an arrangement of subordination under another with higher authority.⁷ In the Hellenistic period, ὑποτάσσω means "to affix under" in writings or "to arrange under a rubric" which indicates an arranged order of things whether in documents, in the military, or in societal

⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 283.

structure. In most instances, it “does not mean so much ‘to obey’... or to do the will of someone but rather ‘to lose or surrender one’s own rights or will.’”⁸

τάσσω and its various forms also appear in the LXX around eighty-five times. When ὑποτάσσω is employed as an active verb, it is used to describe the forceful subjection of the world to the Lord or David’s subjection of the nations to his rule. Additionally, there are several occurrences of willful submission to another when using ὑποτάσσω and of accepting one’s subordinate role when the passive verb is employed. 1 Chronicles 29:24 reveals individuals who voluntarily placed themselves under David where the middle form is employed.⁹ The LXX examples reveal similar situations to the ones found in the New Testament as individuals, creation, or nations are placed or voluntarily step into submissive roles. There has been considerable debate over which form ὑποτάσσω appears in outside of active voice. The form is the same between middle and passive voice.

When used in the New Testament, ὑποτάσσω presents a system of organization for levels of authority. Depending on the tense of the verb, it can signify a forced position in the structure or a voluntary placement into the system. The TDNT article on ὑποτάσσω indicates that when ὑποτάσσομαι is used in exhortation it “suggests that the general rule demands readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others.”¹⁰ This same emphasis on both a willful organization of structure and one’s consideration of others continued to be employed throughout

⁸ Gerhard Delling, ὑποτάσσω in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 39–40.

⁹ H. Kee, et al., τάσσω in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second edition, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 460.

¹⁰ Delling, ὑποτάσσω in *TDNT*, 45.

the early church in letters by the early church fathers stating the relationship of church leaders to God, church members to church leaders, and all things to God.¹¹

Paul used ὑπέταξεν, which is ὑποτάσσω in its aorist active form in Ephesians 1:22, while explaining that Jesus subjugated “all things under his feet.” In its active form, the impact of the word is a forcing of submission on others, yet in Ephesians 5:21, ὑποτασσόμενοι is used which has led to much discussion concerning whether it is in the middle or passive voice. Harold Hoehner does not see much exegetical difference between the middle and passive voice. In his opinion, the primary difference is that the “passive could connote that the subject has no control of the action” while the “middle expresses the idea of cooperation where the subject acts as a free agent.”¹² While there are not major differences between the impact of the passive or middle forms, the idea passively letting the Lord place people or willfully placing oneself into a position could highlight the sovereignty of God or highlight the personal decision needed within a context.

After a series of active commands previously used in Ephesians 5:15-20, Hoehner believes that Paul changes form and uses a middle voice to signify the influence of the Spirit in terms of how one relates with other believers by willingly submitting one’s own will to another.¹³ This call for submission is not merely being placed into a role of submitting to others but voluntarily entering this role in order to better showcase what it means to follow the Lord. As a believer seeks to imitate God and live based on God’s commands (Ephesians 5:1), that believer

¹¹ Delling, ὑποτάσσω in *TDNT*, 45–46.

¹² Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 716-717.

¹³ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians in Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Philemon*, CBC (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 110.

is called to conform his or her life to God's standards, and this includes this willing submission to other Christians.

Some have argued for ὑποτασσόμενοι to be in a passive voice in Ephesians 5:21 due to the passive form being closely associated with a dative form.¹⁴ This line of thinking finds its roots within the grammatical structure. The stream of active verbs would indicate a willful decision to follow the commands given in this section as a Christian conforms to God's standards. As Paul develops this section, he includes the call to embrace the submissive role to each other by using the passive voice with its connection to the dative ἀλλήλων. With this change from the active voice to the passive voice, Paul is telling the people of the church in Ephesus that this submission is embracing this subservient stance towards others Christians in "fear of the Lord." The significance of using the passive voice means that this type of submission between believers is not intended to be heavy handed, forced, or oppressive but was an act of God who structured this type of mutual relationship to reflect one's view of Jesus. Submitting to another does not mean that the one in authority is superior to the one submitting. Instead of teaching a hierarchy of significant individuals or positions, Paul teaches that this submission is based upon one's own ultimate submission to the instruction of Jesus.¹⁵ The focus is removed from those in authority to the superiority of God by focusing on the motivation for why Christians should submit: "out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

Using the same Greek word, Luke 2:51 says that Jesus, in His relationship with His earthly parents, "was submissive to them." ὑποτασσόμενος is followed by the dative αὐτοῖς

¹⁴ William Arndt, Frederick Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 848.

¹⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 720.

which would also indicate that the passive form is used which shows someone becoming subject to another, and this falls inline with the household codes seen in Ephesians as Jesus became subject to His earthly parents as part of God's structure for society.¹⁶ This cannot mean that Joseph and Mary were superior to Jesus but that Jesus accepted the function that they took as His parents, and so He maintained an attitude of submission towards them. This role was part of God's design for the family, and Jesus willingly submitted to this role. In the same way, submitting to these other roles in the family, the church, and society is part of God's plan for humanity. Sometimes, God uses a forced submission such as when David, through the power of God, forced the submission of his enemies to his rule (Psalm 18:48) or when God holds all of creation in submission to Himself (1 Corinthians 15:27). However, the call of submission for Christians reveals God's desire for each Christian to voluntarily serve others based on the ultimate desire to serve the Lord as the Lord has placed each person into a particular function within society.

When understanding the use of ὑποτάσσω in each passage, one must consider first whether it is in its active, passive, or middle voice in order to determine if the submission was forced, voluntary, or passive. Then, one must see how the relationship is developed between the one in submission and the one in authority. This will lead to a fuller understanding for the extent or limit of submission intended in the passage as well as one's own role in submitting to the one in authority. While there are some passages which use ὑποτάσσω to indicate a Christian's responsibilities to the government, other biblical passages provide additional information as to how a believer must interact with government edicts for issues such as paying taxes.

¹⁶ Arndt, Danker, Arndt, and Ginchich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1042.

Matthew 22:15-22 and Paying Taxes

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was confronted by the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians as they tried to entangle Him with a question concerning paying taxes to Rome. The fact that the Pharisees sent their disciples could have been a ploy to catch Jesus in a more relaxed setting since the Pharisees themselves did not approach Him.¹⁷ However, a group consisting of those training with the Pharisees and some who were part of the Herodians, a political group focused on supporting Herod, would have been a strange sight since they typically would disagree with each other. The very nature of their question to Jesus concerning the lawfulness of paying taxes to Caesar would have been of interest to both groups, though they had different answers, as one promoted Jewish law apart from the Romans and the other group supported the Roman appointed leaders.

When hearing this question concerning taxes, many of the people would have known of a recent Jewish rebellion which started over this very issue of taxes.¹⁸ The Herodian family had the responsibility of collection a certain amount of funds for Rome, but they also had the right to collect additional funds for themselves and their political pursuits. As such, the people often felt a burden due to the level of taxation levied against them, so Jesus' answer would either be viewed as supporting the oppression of a burdened people or as a statement fomenting rebellion just like a recent uprising against Roman rule.¹⁹

¹⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2003), 719.

¹⁸ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2013), 227.

¹⁹ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 720–21.

A Question of Taxes

Matthew 22:15 mentions that the Pharisees “went and plotted how to entangle” Jesus with His own words. Charles Quarles sees this phrase, συμβούλιον ἔλαβον, as a clear indication of forming an entrapping plot, and these words also indicate the Pharisees’ focus and purpose for this section.²⁰ The two groups of the Pharisees’ disciples and the Herodians were given the task of delivering the Pharisees’ plot against Jesus. Their flattery of Jesus is part of their plot against Him, and the Gospel of Matthew clearly shows that those who questioned Jesus did not desire to know Jesus’ answer but desired to entrap Him.²¹

After the attempt at flattering, they asked Jesus concerning the lawfulness of paying taxes to Caesar. R. T. France indicates that the specific tax being referred to in this passage is most likely the annual poll tax which was also the heart of the issue leading to the rebellion in 6 A.D.²² Depending on Jesus’ answer, this group would either be able to report Jesus’ negative response to the Roman authorities who could then arrest Jesus as a rebel or report Jesus’ positive answer to the people who were languishing under Roman rule.²³ From the people’s perspective, taxes represented Roman oppression and those who supported the collecting of taxes and were forced to the outskirts of society.²⁴

At the heart of this issue is the question of who holds authority to tell the people to pay taxes.²⁵ The fact that the Pharisees chose this type of question in their attempt to entangle Jesus

²⁰ Quarles, *Matthew*, 260.

²¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 832.

²² *Ibid.*, 829.

²³ Robert S. Snow and Arseny Ermakov, *Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, NBBC (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2019), 327–28.

²⁴ Rodney Reed, “Giving to Caesar What Is Caesar’s: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective Part One: The Bible,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33, no. 2 (2014): 132.

²⁵ The Greek word translated “Is it lawful” comes from the Greek word ἔξεστιν. This can be translated as a question referring to the rightness of something or whether something is proper. See Charles Quarles, *Matthew*, 261.

reveals the conflicting views of the day. This conflict is highlighted by the presence of both the Pharisees' disciples along with the Herodians, but their focus on entrapping Jesus also reveals that they did not truly care about the answer to this question. The priority of the day was to discredit Jesus in one way or another. In spite of their ill intent, Jesus turned the conversation into a lesson on the extent one should give back to God.

An Answer Concerning Image

Matthew 22:18 reveals that Jesus was aware of their ill intent towards Him and called them out by declaring their own hypocrisy concerning the matter. He asked them for the coin for the tax, which was a denarius. The reason that He called them hypocrites was shown when they produced one of the coins. The hypocrisy was due to their own views concerning the images on coins such as this one. Roman coins had the image of Caesar on them with a statement that he was a "son of god." Because of these aspects of Roman money, the Jews viewed these coins as idolatrous as they contained an image of Caesar and a statement declaring him to be divine.²⁶ The fact that they had a coin to produce for Jesus was a statement that they were willing to use Roman money while not wanting to support Roman services. If the Pharisees' disciples were truly concerned about the rightness of paying a tax to Rome, they would have taken more care with the money that they were willing to use. Additionally, the Herodians would have supported the collection of taxes for the Herodian family, so siding with those who would oppose the use of Roman coins is hypocritical as they showed solidarity with them. The combination of these two

In some ways, this refers back to the nature of who holds the authority to tell the people that they had to pay this tax. If Jesus responds that they do have to pay this tax, He would be affirming Roman authority. If Jesus says that this tax was not proper, He could be viewed as attacking the authority of the Romans.

²⁶ France, *Matthew*, 830.

groups which seemed to support both sides of this topic revealed the pursuit of their own agendas instead of actually caring about the concerns of the people.

Jesus called them out on the nature of the coin they had just brought to Him. He asked after the image and inscription on the coin. The image on the coin was clearly of Caesar, and the inscription references the belief of Caesar's elevated status.²⁷ The image of Caesar on the coin would suggest Caesar's ownership of that item and his claim upon the money. This is what Jesus referred to in 22:21 in that one should return²⁸ items back to Caesar which are his in the first place. Then, Jesus continued His answer to say that they should also give back to God the things that are bearing the likeness of God. Michael Wilkins sees this connection based on the image of God in man mentioned in Genesis 1:26-27. Since God made man in His image, all people belong to God, so God has a claim on all people.²⁹

Inherent in Jesus' answer is the reality that one's civil authorities can lay a rightful claim on individuals' resources. Taxes are part of a government's function, so God's followers need to embrace their role in paying back to the government what is owed to the government for the services given for the people.³⁰ The money is printed under the authority of the government, and taxes are part of what it takes for everything to function for the betterment of society. However, Jesus uses the civil obligations of those around Him to then indicate a greater responsibility that people have to God as His image is in all people. Hence, God requires submission to the state, yet Jesus will use submission to the state to point to the greater submission to the ways of God.

²⁷ France, *Matthew*, 833.

²⁸ "Render" comes from the Greek word Ἀπόδοτε which comes with the indication of returning something that is due to the one you are giving the item back. In terms of a tax from the Roman Empire, it carries the connotation that it is due for the services rendered by the Empire. France, *Matthew*, 834.

²⁹ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 722.

³⁰ Reed, "Giving to Caesar," 135.

The lesser to the greater argument will then provide the dividing line for submission to the state through teaching that all of life is to be rendered for service to God.

A Greater Responsibility to God

While Jesus uses the denarius to show what is owed to Rome, Jesus does not explicitly state all that is owed to God. Instead, He leaves the answer up to the knowledge of the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodians' knowledge. Following this section in Matthew, Matthew 22:34-40 offers a clear indication that the answer to verse 21 is one's complete devotion to God based on 22:37.³¹ Robert Snow and Arseny Ermakov make this connection in Matthew 22 when they write that "it is about giving back or dedicating to God everything and even one's life."³² Matthew 22:21 makes an argument from a lesser example to a greater example by moving from what is owed to the civil leader to what is owed to God. While the government does supply many benefits for its citizens, God's image is placed directly on mankind, and God is the One who created all things. Jesus makes the entrapping question much more about being completely dedicated to God instead of focusing on the smaller issue of whether or not to pay one's taxes.³³

During the Reformation, Luther developed the concept of two spheres of authority and responsibilities: the church and government. Others would develop this perspective of separation of church and state due to this concept of different realms of authority.³⁴ This concept of separate spheres of life has lead people to create a system which places certain responsibilities into each

³¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 322. On this page, France connects Jesus' statement to Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and reveals that this phrase was regularly said by pious Jews. As Matthew wrote this section, he makes a purposeful connection between these verses and the teaching of paying taxes to Caesar and paying back to God what is owed to God.

³² Snow and Ermakov, *Matthew*, 328.

³³ David Ball, "What Jesus Really Meant by 'Render Unto Caesar,'" *Bible Review* 19, no. 2 (April 2003): 16-17.

³⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 331-32.

sphere with an understanding that each sphere of authority in one's life should not overstep itself into another sphere,³⁵ yet Jesus' words do not show a separation of these parts of life but the superiority of one's "giving back" to God. As such, the Old Testament teaches that God is the One who establishes all authorities on the earth, so one's obedience to the civil authority that God has established is an acknowledgment of the situation that God has established for all people. When there is conflict between the edicts of the government and God's nature or commands, Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:37-38 reveals the priority of being completely dedicated to God as taught in the Old Testament. From this basis of being completely dedicated to God, one is then directed in one's interactions with others on this earth.

Matthew 22:15-22 is based upon the kingship of God over all of the kingdoms of the earth,³⁶ and this understanding comes from the theology of God's kingship developed from the Old Testament and continued through the New Testament. God is the One who establishes and tears down all authorities, so submission to one's civil authority is an act of submission to God. Leon Morris illustrates this when he writes that Christians are able to "serve Caesar in a way that is honoring to God" by giving to the government what is owed to them according to God's commands.³⁷ While this passage in Matthew does not mention submission explicitly, this concept is still inherent in Jesus' instruction to give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, yet the greater concept to embrace for God's followers is the superiority of God as all of humanity carries the image of God. From this understanding, people owe all things to God including themselves.

³⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 831.

³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 331.

³⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 557-58.

Romans 13:1-7 and Submission to Governing Authorities

In Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he was writing to Christians who resided in the place of power for the entire empire. Romans 13:1-7 contains specific instruction to the believers to subject themselves to the governing authorities, but one must take note of the context of this passage. Romans 13:1-7 is part of a larger section which consists of Romans 12:1-13:14 and "deals with general issues of Christian living."³⁸ This focus can be seen as Romans 12:1 has an appeal to the "brothers," or those who are already Christians, and continues in its instruction for them to use their gifts for one another and for their love to be genuine towards each other. This passage continues with further instruction for when they interact with those who would be hostile to those who would live for Jesus with the conclusion of this passage in 12:21 which says, "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

From these concepts and instructions, Paul then writes Romans 13:1-7 with specific instruction for believers' interactions with the governing authorities. As seen from the context, Paul has in his mind the reality that the Roman Empire is sometimes hostile to the ways of Jesus, and within this acknowledgement, he writes Romans 13:1-7 to guide Christians in their responses towards those governmental officials. Craig Keener sees this transition from the end of chapter 12 to the statements about government officials in chapter 13 as a call to refuse to respond to evil attacks in kind but to instead respond in a good way. Romans 13:1-7 then represents one way to accomplish this call to live according to the transforming power of Jesus.³⁹

³⁸ Charles Talbert, *Romans*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 279.

³⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 151–52.

The Context for Romans 13:1-7

Paul, in Romans 13:1, uses a form of ὑποτάσσω as he calls for the Christians in Rome to submit to the Roman government since all governments have been established by God. In this verse, ὑποτασσεσθω is passive imperative verb as it is connected to the dative words ἐξουσίας ὑπερεχούσας. The passive form of ὑποτάσσω shows the need for Christians to recognize that God had placed them under the authority of Rome, and Paul's instructions calls for the believers to embrace that role of submission. Paul is telling the believers in Rome to embrace the role given to them by God by submitting to the civil authorities placed by God. The words ἐξουσίας ὑπερεχούσας relates to the civil authorities with its interplay with the use of ὑπερ here and the description of the origin of the government's authority as ὑπὸ θεοῦ. Every soul is under the authority of those in charge, yet they receive that authority from God. J. I. H. McDonald sees this word-play as a positive view of God's delegation of the government since the authority relates back to God. Hence, submission relates back to God's established order within society.⁴⁰

Since God is the One who established the government, Rome's authority is derived from God, so the believers' ultimate submission is still oriented on God. Going back to Romans 12:1-2, this call to embrace this submissive role to the government is part of what it means for Christians to be a living sacrifice that is transformed by the work of salvation. Because Christians are to be focused on living in a way to please God, they must see the sovereignty of God as He establishes the authority of civil authority on earth. Philip Wogaman understands this

⁴⁰ J. I. H. McDonald, "Romans 13:1-7: A Test Case for New Testament Interpretation," *New Testament Studies* vol. 35 (1989), 543.

key point to be the guiding theological truth which should protect Christians from creating idols out of political parties or ideals since primary focus is on God who is over all authority.⁴¹

This derived authority that a government receives from God is a continuation of Old Testament understanding concerning civil governments according to James Prothro's study on Romans 13:1-7.⁴² This study aligns with the previous chapter of this dissertation in that followers of God are to see God's sovereignty at work as God places His people within nations to represent Him. Because God is the ultimate authority behind the establishment of civil governments, Christians are called to submit to those governments. This means that they are to place themselves voluntarily under the authority of those governments out of a desire to submit to God's own kingship. This delegated authority from God to civil governments does not indicate the perfection of those governments, as Erik Borggren highlights, for Christians' submission to the government is not to be based upon the righteousness of those in authority or their laws but based on the example left by Jesus as indicated in passages such as Philippians 3:20-21.⁴³ Jesus will ultimately reign as King of kings, and so Christians are to serve King Jesus to the best of their abilities in spite of the reality that sinful situations surround them. McDonald even goes so far as to say that Christians should "give their assent to the function of the authorities in society and indeed understand that function theologically."⁴⁴

It is worth noting that the biblical authors call on Christians to submit to the civil governments and that the biblical authors do not call them to obey the authorities. While

⁴¹ Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 200), 165.

⁴² James B. Prothro, "Distance, Tolerance, and Honor: Six Theses on Romans 13:1-7," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (2016): 297.

⁴³ Erik Borggren, "Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 3:17-21: Paul's Call to True Citizenship and to Gaman," *The Covenant Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (May 2015): 37.

⁴⁴ McDonald, "Romans 13:1-7," 544.

obedience is part of the call to submit, biblical submission to civil authorities is a secondary calling subservient to the ultimate call to submit to God. Since God is the focus of submission, He must be obeyed in all things, yet the call to submit to civil authorities is based upon complete submission to God. When the government tries to interpose itself into God's position, Christians are left with a situation when they must still properly respect government officials, based on passages such as Romans 13:7, yet they are not to obey civil authorities if that obedience would cause a Christian to sin as sinning would hurt one's relationship with God and represent the dividing line between obedience and disobedience.

This order of priorities concerning submission represents one reason to focus on the nature of submission and not to use the concept of obedience for these passages.⁴⁵ Obedience is to be prominent in a Christian's personal walk with God. Complete obedience should not be given to others, for this would require a perfection of the one who is to be obeyed or conflicts will arise between the one obeying and God's commands.⁴⁶ Even the command in Ephesians 6:1 for children to obey their parents is placing that obedience "in the Lord" and not on the inherent goodness of parents. As Peter Davids explains "submission to these people [government officials] is guided by and limited by the phrase 'on account of the Lord.'"⁴⁷ This parameter of "on account of the Lord" is what is to guide every act of submission to other humans as one's priority of submission is to the Lord alone.

⁴⁵ Scott R Murray, "Romans 13:1-7 and the Two Kingdoms," *Logia* 30, no. 1 (2021): 12. This author highlights the need to obey one's government, yet the biblical passages use ὑποτάσσω. This switch can lead to issues when then incorporating passages such as Acts 5:29 into the topic as direct obedience is not the focus on Romans 13:1-7 or 1 Peter 2:13-17 but on submission which necessitates one's priority of focus on submission to God.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 142.

⁴⁷ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd edition, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 99.

From this larger picture for the context of Romans 13, Christians are to first focus on their duties for the church and then on Christians in their duties to the state. Within this instruction, the motivation for letting God's Word through Paul take root in their lives is based upon the transformational work of salvation, as seen in Romans 12:2. This transformational work enables Christians to know the will of God and to accomplish that purpose of God for them. Scott Murray focuses in on Christians' justification in Jesus as the means to then accomplish the high calling of Jesus in both the church in the state.⁴⁸

Because of the change in their lives brought about by salvation in Jesus, Christians now had this task of pursuing the will of God with their lives, and this pursuit was to pervade every aspect of their lives. Since these Christians were located in the heart of the Roman Empire, it makes logical sense for Paul to specifically address their interactions with the authorities. The Christians' dedication to the ways of God was going to put them into conflict with Rome since the empire was completely inundated with false worship even in the mundane activities of life. Richard Longenecker sees this conflict between Roman ideals of worship and true worship of God as necessitating Paul's statement that submission to one's governing officials was actually done for the Lord who instituted that government.⁴⁹

Added to this situation is that many in Rome would have remembered Claudius' edict expelling the Jews from Rome, and this could have led to an inherent undertone of resentment toward the government by the Christians since they saw a deep connection between the Jewish race and the religion of Christianity.⁵⁰ However, the reason behind Paul's instruction to them to submit was not on the basis of how righteous or good the government and the officials were in

⁴⁸ Murray, "Romans 13," 7.

⁴⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 948.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 953.

their eyes. Instead, Erik Borggren highlights a connection between Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 3:17-21 which makes one's true citizenship in heaven the motivation to continue on faithfully in this life as representatives of their true home in heaven. From the hope of heaven, one is able to live life in this broken world according to the prescriptions of God while living a transformed life because of God's salvation.⁵¹

In spite of the issues of past grievances against the government and the nature of Roman worship, Paul still called for the Christians in Rome to be subject to those who were governing on the basis of the transformation that Jesus had done in their lives as long as they were able to do so while living for the greater authority of God. From this transformation, their relationships with others and with institutions changed as they sought to live according to the will of God for their lives. This is the groundwork that Paul laid first before then specifically detailing what it meant for the Christians to submit to their government.

The Intention of Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1 is addressed to every person, but one must also understand the greater context which begins in Romans 12:1 and its address to saved individuals. With the Greek phrase Πᾶσα ψυχή, J. A. Draper sees this section addressing the actions of each Christian within the church and not a passage devoted to explaining how the state should operate.⁵² These verses could easily be misapplied if one misses the intention of this section in addressing a believer's response towards the government. If one sees Romans 13:1-7 addressing individuals and those in positions of civil authority, one can see more of a contractual situation which places conditions

⁵¹ Borggren, "Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 3:17-21," 37.

⁵² Jonathan A Draper, "'Humble Submission to Almighty God' and Its Biblical Foundation: Contextual Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 63 (June 1988): 35.

on the level of submission that Paul calls for in this passage as individuals such as John Knox and John MacArthur. This can be seen in commentaries and articles on this passage when some insert the words *legitimate government* when explaining the level to which one should submit to the government.⁵³

By adding the word *legitimate* to the conversation, one puts extra parameters on the call of submission to the state which were not part of Paul's intent since Paul was not writing to the government but to the church. Paul told the church in Rome to submit to ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις which means those who exercise authority while governing others.⁵⁴ Frederick Bruner takes this phrase to focus more on the office within the government more than on individuals who occupy the government positions since it relates more to those who are exercising the authority.⁵⁵ As such, one must remain in submission to the governing office regardless who occupies that position while keeping the parameters of one's primary submission to God in all areas of life (Romans 12:1-2).

Romans 12:2 begins the greater section as Paul is explaining to the Christians in Rome how salvation should be transforming them, and Romans 13:1-7 then shows them how salvation should be impacting their interactions with civil authorities. If the focus of this section is truly on individual Christians and their attitudes towards those who govern over them, the submission that Paul calls them to in this passage is not conditional on the government upholding its end of a social contract. Rodney Reed summarizes those who would see a more contract based call for submission when he wrote "when a government ceases to be God's servant doing good to its

⁵³ Murray, "Romans 13," 10.

⁵⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 795–96.

⁵⁵ Frederick Bruner, *The Letter to the Romans: A Short Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 165.

subjects, it forfeits the right to command the allegiance of those subjects.”⁵⁶ Rodney Reed focuses on the sections which explain some roles of the government and the fact that the government is an agent of God. This is what leads him and others to see this passage as some sort of contract which lays out both Christians’ responsibilities and the government’s responsibilities, yet Paul wrote this section knowing that the Roman government did not follow God but followed multiple false gods. There is no indication that Paul was attempting to instruct the Roman officials in this passage. Instead, he was offering guidance to believers concerning their own attitudes and actions towards the officials and their commands.

Since the focus of the passage is on Christians, inserting *legitimate governments* into this discussion adds exemptions to the discussion which were unintended by Paul. Nothing in the passage indicates that Paul was attempting to fully define the function of government or add parameters on submission based on the government instead of being based on God’s commands. Michael Bird sees more of a focus on guiding Christians to maintain a focus on how to live within the moment for Jesus without becoming distracted with either an “over-realized eschatology” or an “under-realized eschatology” that is too heavily focused on who is ruling instead of how to live as a Christian. Instead, Paul calls for Christians to recognize God’s sovereignty in every moment of their lives, and so Christians need to focus on living out the Spirit in their lives instead of being overconcerned with the function of the government.⁵⁷

Along with the focus on the individual Christian, a central intention of this passage is the reality that God is the One who has delegated authority to civil governments. This follows the Old Testament trajectory on this topic as seen in Jeremiah, Daniel, and elsewhere.⁵⁸ Romans 13:1

⁵⁶ Reed, “Giving to Caesar What Is Caesar’s: Part One,” 137.

⁵⁷ John Bird, *Romans*, SGBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 442–43.

⁵⁸ For specific examples, see Longenecker, *Romans*, 959–61.

says, “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” This does not mean that God is culpable for the actions of those in authority, but God is the One behind the established authority of governing officials. The fact that God has established all governments sets the foundation for why Christians are to submit to the governing officials. This hierarchy of authority also establishes the framework to understand Paul’s seemingly unquantified call to submit to the government. Since government has been established by God, one’s ultimate submission is still toward God Himself, and part of one’s submission to God is adhering to God’s instruction to live according to His delegated authorities in life.⁵⁹ This hierarchy of authority also calls to mind the trajectory of Scripture in examples such as Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah to understand the limitations, or dividing lines, placed upon God’s followers when confronted with orders which go against God’s nature or commands.

Romans 13:1-7 was written within the greater narrative of Scripture, so God’s delegated authority mentioned in Romans 13 should carry with it an application of the previous biblical information provided in the Old Testament. As James Prothro makes the connection with the Old Testament, Romans 13:1-7 continues the clear teaching that God is sovereign over the nations, so Christians have the responsibility to live in the reality that God has established all government authority.⁶⁰

The Application of Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1 declares twice that God establishes the government’s authority. This verse first states that without God’s delegation there would be no authority, and the verse continues

⁵⁹ Robert Mounce, *Romans: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1995), 243.

⁶⁰ Prothro, “Distance, Tolerance, and Honor,” 297.

that those who are in positions of government authority are there because God appointed them into those positions.⁶¹ The next verse begins with ὥστε, therefore, which shows that what is to come in verse 2 is based upon the statements in the previous verse, and Romans 13:2 contains a strong statement that resistance against the authorities mentioned in the previous verse is resistance against God’s appointments and will bring about judgment. This word for judgment, κρίμα, indicates a condemnation with an “emphasis upon the verdict and resulting state.”⁶² The nature of this judgment is not explained within this passage. Douglas Moo offers some of the various views suggested as to the extent of the judgment intended in this passage. Some suggest that this judgment indicates eternal damnation due to the reality of rejecting God and His commands, thus indicating someone is not saved. Another perspective focuses on the right for the government to punish the individual in rebellion against it with God’s blessing on that judgment, and the final major view, which Moo adheres to, focuses more on eschatological punishment.⁶³ This last viewpoint would focus more on loss of reward in heaven or some other aspect of judgment as spoken about in Revelation.

The context for this judgment is difficult as both God and the government officials are referenced in the surrounding context, so this judgment should be understood as a combination of both God’s judgment and judgment given by the government due to the nature of resistance entailed in this passage. Even the meaning of ἀντιπασσόμενος, which is translated “resistance,” does not necessarily answer all of the questions a reader could have as to the extent of resistance

⁶¹ “Appointed” comes from the Greek word τεταγμένοι which means to be assigned or placed into a position over another. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Second edition, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 798.

⁶² Jeremiah Garrett, “Justice,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, LBRS (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁶³ Moo, *Romans*, 799.

it indicates. ἀντιτασσόμενος is another form of τάσσω but with the opposite actions of ὑποτάσσω. In Romans 13:2, Paul also uses ἀνθέστηκεν as another Greek word which also indicates some form of resistance against the government authorities.

Kent Hughes sees inherent exceptions to the prohibition against resisting due to the fact that governments can oppose God through their laws and actions.⁶⁴ Part of this debate concerning inherent restrictions is based upon the lack of clarity concerning the extent of the government's authority, yet if one takes Paul's writing within the context of the greater narrative of Scripture, one can see the train of teaching, from the Old Testament examples, that limits the government's commands from countermanding God's commands. The dividing line, as seen through Old Testament examples, is anything which would go against God's commands or nature as well as any prohibition to do as God has commanded. Apart from issues which would then conflict with God's nature or commands and would necessitate resistance in the form of disobedience, resistance to other applications of the government's authority would fight against God's delegated authority.

For example, Paul then goes into an explanation of the government's responsibilities in Romans 13:3-4. In this explanation, Paul states that those who do good should have no fear of a government's actions. This is the goal, yet Paul also knew that he was writing to those in the Roman Empire's capitol. Conversely, those who do wrong, κακὸν, should be rightfully fearful of the government's punishment for that wrong. κακὸν carries the connotation of actions which are "morally evil."⁶⁵ With Paul's use of κακὸν, Paul's instructions reveal that, even if a government fights against God's nature, a believer's actions should never be also against God's nature in his

⁶⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 234.

⁶⁵ G. Scott Gleaves, "Evil," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

or her attempt to refrain from being compelled to go against God at the government's instruction. For those who do wrong, the government actually serves as a minister, *διάκονός* which is the same word used to reference deacons for the church, who serves God by punishing these wrongdoers. As such, Kent Hughes sees the use of *διάκονός* as indicative of the inherent function of the government as a means to carry out God's will whether or not those in the government intend to accomplish the will of God.⁶⁶

Romans 13:5-6 begins with indicators that these verses are based upon this role that the government plays as a minister of God according to God's purposes. Because the government serves God and has been given authority by God, 13:5 calls for the believers to "be in subjection" to the government based on both avoiding God's wrath and for "the sake of conscience." Douglas Moo sees this reference to a person's conscience as indicating a "believer's knowledge of God's will and purposes" which then direct a person's actions.⁶⁷ This explanation of the phrase aligns with the greater context for this passage which begins in Romans 12:1 and relates to following God's will. In other words, a believer should never do something that goes against one's understanding of God's expectations to live for Him. This establishes the concept of both refraining from evil actions which would incur God's wrath through the government's actions and living on the basis of one's understanding of God's nature and commands. When seen in light of the greater context for this passage, Colin Kruse sees the reference to one's conscience as a call to act based on "the highest standard a person perceives."⁶⁸ If a Christian follows this high standard, that Christian will be returning to what

⁶⁶ Hughes, *Romans*, 236.

⁶⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 803.

⁶⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 497.

Romans 12:1-2 teaches on the transforming power of salvation. From this standard, one will live in subjection to those God has placed over him or her because of the high calling of God.

In the final two verses of this section, Paul addresses the basis for paying taxes, since the government serves as “ministers of God,” and addresses both the actions demanded by his instructions and mentality needed when interacting with officials. The call to pay taxes aligns with Jesus’ statements in Matthew 22 and solidifies the basic understanding that the government has the right to tax those under its authority. Romans 13:7 reiterates this that taxes go to those who are owed taxes, and revenue goes to those to whom revenue is owed. However, the second half of this verse goes beyond the mechanical paying of taxes and extends to the way that believers should respect and honor those who are in positions of civil authority. Φόβον, fear or respect, and τιμὴν, honor, are employed to indicate the extent of what it means to be submissive to the governing authorities. This respect and honor is not based upon the inherent greatness or goodness of the individual but goes back to the sovereignty of God who establishes the offices of civil authority and provides individuals to fill those positions.

The Significance of Romans 13:1-7

Paul, in his greater context of explaining how salvation should be changing how they are interacting with the world, tells those in Rome that the government is given its authority from God and serves Him. Because of this, a Christian’s actions towards the government needs to be based on submission, respect, and honor. This relationship with one’s civil government is not based upon the righteousness of those in office but based upon one’s ultimate submission to God and His commands. Submission to one’s government does not mean overlooking the transgressions of the civil authorities, but as Kent Hughes clarifies, Christians must still maintain

a submissive, respectful attitude towards the officials even when recognizing and, potentially, confronting those transgressions.⁶⁹

Romans 13:1-7 does not contain overt instructions as to when Christians are permitted to go against ungodly instructions from the government, yet one must also consider that Paul wrote Romans while having a solid foundation in Old Testament teaching concerning God's sovereignty over the nations. With this understanding of past revelation, Michael Bird emphasizes that Christians must always live "as exemplary citizens" on the basis on God's moral instruction through His Word.⁷⁰ For example, Daniel's conduct when refusing to obey Nebuchadnezzar was God-honoring. He remained submissive in attitude, in the same way in which Paul gives instruction in Romans 13:7, while clearly stating why he had to disobey a command which went against God's nature or commands. For the time of the church, Paul's teaching highlights the need to refrain from morally corrupt behavior and disrespectful attitudes against God's chosen officials for the world's kingdoms. This can be done by submitting to the will of God as the first priority in all aspects of life. From this ultimate submission, Christians are to live submissively to the civil authorities God has placed over them with the understanding that one's actions or inactions must align with God's nature and commands.

1 Peter 2:13-17 and Submission to Every Human Institution

Peter wrote his first letter to "the elect exiles" (1 Peter 1:1) concerning how they are to live as Christians, while suffering, as they are scattered throughout "modern-day Turkey."⁷¹ In terms of the believers' interactions with government officials, Peter follows the same pattern as

⁶⁹ Hughes, *Romans*, 238.

⁷⁰ Bird, *Romans*, 449.

⁷¹ Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter and Jude*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 45.

Paul did in Romans 13:1-7. 1 Peter 2:11-12 contains instructions for the believer's own holiness, as sojourners and exiles, in order to draw others to knowledge of God. With this instruction in mind, Peter then continues into the next section as to how Christians should be representing God to others in all aspects of life including interacting with representatives of the government in 2:13-17.⁷² Specifically, 2:12 mentioned how the believers were to interact with those who acted against the church, and one could see how addressing the government would be applicable to this conversation as the Roman Empire had often been at odds with the basic tenets of serving Jesus.⁷³

This concept is echoed in 1 Peter as he calls on the "elect exiles" to order their relationships based on God's designed plan for them. When viewing the nature of submission in 1 Peter, Robert Richardson sees a parallel between the nature of submission in society, the family, and slavery in Peter's day. Christians were to organize their lives based on the call of God and a desire to win others to Christ, and part of this overall message of submission is the call of submission in 1 Peter 2:13 to "every human institution." Robert Richardson sees a movement of meaning from a focus on the nature of authority in 2:13 to more of a consideration for others basis as 1 Peter moves forward. This subtle shift highlights the core need of personal humility while submitting to either the state or to each other, and this basis of humility is what should guide Christians in their interactions with other parts of society.⁷⁴ The humility is not intrinsically based in the superiority of the institution or the individual one is in submission

⁷² Bruce Winter, "'Seek the Welfare of the City:' Social Ethics According to 1 Peter," *Themelios* 13, no. 3 (January 1988), 92.

⁷³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 123.

⁷⁴ Robert Lee Richardson, "From 'Subjection to Authority' to 'Mutual Submission': The Ethic of Subordination in 1 Peter," *Faith and Mission* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 70, 77.

towards, but in Peter's letter, the submission is based upon humility towards God since He is the basis for this call to submit.

1 Peter 2:13 places the motivation for submission as "for the Lord's sake," and the calls for slaves' submission and wives' submission are focused on the will of God within these functions of society. Peter's focus on God aligns with the teaching of Paul that these calls for submission is "one aspect of their obedience to the Lord" based on the situations into which the Lord has placed His followers.⁷⁵ F. F. Bruce also see the emphasis on these calls to submit as being rooted in God's plan for society and on one's own ultimate submission to God to live one's life based on God's commands. Just as Jesus provided the example of humble service, Christians are to "not be self-assertive" but "should place themselves at one another's disposal" as they live as servants of God in this world.⁷⁶ This is what the biblical authors intended to convey when they used ὑποτάσσω in their calls to guide believers in their interactions with other individuals and with their civil governments. Once again, 1 Peter 2:13 employs the dative words πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ along with this call of submission which would align with the previous passages mentioned in terms of grammatical structure. This would suggest another passive form is employed in this passage.

Peter's goal in addressing these issues is not just to refrain from negative actions but also to actively live in such a way as to bring glory to God. This is the point of 1 Peter 2:12 when he writes "they may see your good deeds and glorify God." Peter carries this concept into a believer's role within a community as they are to in such a way as to silence false accusations against them. Ben Witherington makes a connection between this positive instruction in 1 Peter

⁷⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 2nd Revised edition, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 384.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

and Jeremiah's instruction to the Jews in Babylon in that they are to be actively doing good in their cities, and these positive actions are to be blessing even those who are antagonistic towards them.⁷⁷

With this understanding that Christians are to live honorably even when interacting with those who were against them, Peter specifically addresses their role with *πάση ἀνθρώπινῃ κτίσει*, or “every human institution,” which is further defined by Peter when he mentions the emperor or the emperor's delegated leaders such as governors.⁷⁸ This section is regulated by Peter's first word of this section, *ὑποτάγητε*. This is the aorist, passive, imperative form of *ὑποτάσσω*. It carries the idea of “you [plural] be subject.” Translating this word into English presents problems as the English language does not contain an equivalent of a passive imperative verb, but the idea of the verb is to accept one's placement within under the government. This word “forms the basis for the injunctions of vv. 13-16.”⁷⁹ This command indicates that the Christians were already under the authority of those in the government, and they were to embrace this submission to the government for the Lord's sake. Accepting their own submission to the civil government is an acceptance of God's plan for them. This willful, purposeful subjugation to the civil government is a means by which others may be able to see God at work in His people. The motivation for this type of lifestyle is based upon bringing glory to the Lord and not based upon the nature of the individual holding the seat of civil power.

⁷⁷ Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies*, 2:127.

⁷⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 126.

⁷⁹ Greg Forbes, *1 Peter*, EGGNT (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 77.

The Instruction in 1 Peter 2:13-14

Peter is urging Christians to be submissive to those who are part of the governing human institution for the Lord. For the Lord, διὰ τὸν κύριον, is the basis for how one submits to those in authority, and the call to be submissive to the officials is preceded by a call to use one's actions to bring glory to God and is concluded by a reminder that this is to be done for the Lord. Because of these statements focusing on the Lord in this situation, Peter Davids sees this focus on the Lord as what guides and limits one's actions towards the government.⁸⁰ Peter is not telling Christians to blindly follow the government but to be directed in their subservience towards the authorities because of their relationships with the Lord. Christians are to keep a dividing line against the state's encroachment on God's nature or commands.

This submission is to include both the emperor and the emperor's delegated leaders for the more localized areas of the empire. 1 Peter 2:14 indicates that these officials have the task of punishing the evildoers and praising those who do good. This echoes Paul's statements in Romans 13:1-7 in that God has specifically tasked human governments with these roles, yet once again, 1 Peter is not addressed to these civil leaders as a type of contract but is addressed to Christians for how they are to actively respond to their civil leaders. 1 Peter 2:14 is not a conditional clause that is only to be obeyed if the government upholds its end of the deal as some sort of contract, but it is a call to all believers to submit themselves to the officials for the glory of the Lord.

1 Peter 2:15 explains more of the purpose behind Peter's instructions by making this clear statement ὅτι οὕτως ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, "for this is the will of God." Ramsey Michaels sees this entire verse as an explanation for why Christians are to live in a submissive way to the

⁸⁰ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 99.

government as Peter clearly indicates that this instruction is what God desires of His people.⁸¹ God desires that the good actions of Christians be such that those who are speaking against the church are silenced as their accusations hold no ground against Christians' high character (1 Peter 2:12). This silencing of the foolish may not happen during the believers' lifetimes, but Christians are to trust in God's promises and in Him accomplishing His own will. With this statement from 2:12, Peter is developing the believers' eschatological hope that their current situations are having an impact on what will happen in the end.⁸²

Peter's application for this thought is revealed in the next verse that they are to live in their freedom. This does not mean a freedom to sin but a freedom to live as slaves of God. Living within one's freedom coincides with the nature of the passive use of ὑποτάσσω. Joel Green connects ὑποτάσσω to Peter's instruction to "live as people who are free" to point to the fact that "subordination is thus an expression of freedom, not coercion."⁸³ Following this same line of thinking by seeing the connection between submitting to the government and 1 Peter 2:11-12, Ben Witherington recognizes the nature of freedom in this verse to be one's freedom in God and not political freedom.⁸⁴ God does not desire for His people to commit evil actions, as this would do the opposite of 2:12 and 2:15, but to live in such a way as to show others that God is their Master.⁸⁵

The implication in this verse also should relate to the situations in which a believer cannot obey a governmental official or law because that official or law would cause a believer to

⁸¹ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 127.

⁸² Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 101.

⁸³ Joel Green, *1 Peter*, THNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 75.

⁸⁴ Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies*, 2:131.

⁸⁵ The word δοῦλοι is employed here which is better translated as "slave" instead of "servant." The implication is that, as the slaves of God, God is the Master. Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 131.

be hindered in his or her relationship with God by causing that Christian to sin. Just as Paul wrote within the greater narrative of Scripture, Peter should be understood as one who wrote with knowledge of the Old Testament, especially since he was personally trained by Jesus. Submission to the government does not include obeying commands to sin against God's nature or commands, but these refusals do not permit Christians to respond to those officials in such a way that would be evil in God's eyes. Because this entire section is placed within the confining objective of living out the will of God for the glory of God, both the obedient actions and disobedient actions of Christians must be done in such a way as to reveal the nature of God to others. "For the Lord's sake" places parameters on the extent of one's submission to the government, and it places parameters on using one's freedom in God to live for God. As a slave of God, one's actions reflect on God whether through obedience or through disobedience as the Old Testament examples of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah attest.

1 Peter 2:17 provides some more general instructions which further indicate the scope of this section. The quick statements in this verse are bracketed by "honor everyone" and "honor the emperor." Peter Davids observes that these phrases act as bookends and are indicative that the emperor is merely another individual who should be shown honor, just like everyone else. Then love, which is a deeper interaction, must be directed to other Christians, and fear, which is the highest response to someone, is reserved for God.⁸⁶ Of course, there is the additional call to submit to the emperor, but this passage reveals a general call for respect that is to be given to every individual, including even those who were speaking against the Christians.

The lifestyle of one who is living for God represents a radically different life of submission and honor to all, and this is to be done not on the basis of the individual's goodness

⁸⁶ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 104.

but based upon one's desire to serve the Lord. Living this way reveals a believer who is using one's freedom to chose the pathway of God which then can reveals the nature of God to others for the glory of God. Sometimes, Christians will be called on by God to disobey a governmental command because that command would go against Scriptural mandates or against God's commands, yet through disobedience, a Christian is still able to represent God through his or her righteous conduct as that Christian maintains the primary conduit of submission to God.

The Application of 1 Peter 2:13-17

While Peter is in no way advocating that a government or officials in a government are perfect or that governments always fulfill their responsibilities for God, Peter is signifying that Christians are able to rightfully submit to those in governmental positions and are able to have a positive view of government.⁸⁷ The government should not be viewed as an inherent enemy of the church even though some in positions of authority do speak and act against Christians. Instead of only having a negative view of government, Christians must embrace Peter's and Paul's teaching that the government was instituted by God, so submission to the government is part of one's submission to God as well part of what it means for the work of the Spirit to take root in a believer. The Spirit should change a how a believer lives in this world for the glory of God while representing Him to those who do not know him. God desires for His people to live honorably in spite of the corruptness in this world including those who occupy government positions. To the best of their ability as long as they are able to still submit to God, they are to submit to the officials as part of what it means to live for the Lord.

⁸⁷ Forbes, *1 Peter*, 80.

As part of this call to submit to one's civil authorities, this section teaches the superior purpose of living according to God's will and instruction based on the repeated statement concerning the believer's motivation for submitting to the officials. Since the call to submit to the authorities is based on one's submission to God, one must always consider how both obedience and disobedience towards the government reflects on God's nature and laws. Christians are not to act based upon their own desires but based upon aligning with God's standards. Hence, Christians must be clear concerning was command from Scripture or aspect of God's nature would require them to disobey the state. This clarity would enable the Christian to point directly back to God as one's primary ruler who is over every earthly leader.

On top of recognizing God's sovereignty over human institutions, one must also understand that a believer's action of submission is part of one's testimony to the unsaved concerning the affects of salvation.⁸⁸ 1 Peter 1 addresses the positive outcomes of enduring trials and continues with a call to be controlled by the holiness of God and not one's passions. A Christian has been changed by the power of Jesus, and this change means embracing the instruction of the Lord to adapt one's life to His ways. Christians are to represent Jesus to others, and this must include both honoring all people as well as submission to every human institution of the government. Through these acts of submission and honor towards other, Christians are able to positively respond to those who speak evil against them and to use their good deeds to bring glory to God.

⁸⁸ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 132.

Concluding Lessons from the New Testament

Returning to Acts 5:29, one can better understand the theology behind Peter's statement "we must obey God rather than men" when tracing the theological trajectory of this topic of submission to one's civil authorities. Peter viewed the power struggle between God's commands and the Sanhedrin's commands as an easy choice. As John Polhill said, "Peter had no choice" as to whom he would ultimately obey since obedience to the Sanhedrin would require disobedience to God.⁸⁹ This was Peter's dividing line when decided who to serve. When only one authority can be followed, that authority must always be God since He is the one who has delegated authority to all others. God's supreme sovereignty, as He alone establishes and removes kingdoms of the earth, must reign supreme in the lives of Christians.

Additionally, Jesus' name is worthy to be proclaimed in spite of any opposition on earth. Peter continues his speech into Acts 5:30-32 by declaring Jesus' sacrifice for sins and exultation to the right hand of God as the Savior who is able to redeem Israel of its sins. The assumption here, as seen by Ben Witherington, is that Peter is also referring to the Sanhedrin and its sins. In spite of the blood on their hands, there is a Savior who can forgive their sins.⁹⁰ Even while on trial, Peter was bold in declaring the name of Jesus to those who were threatening them.

Peter and the other Apostles recognized the authority represented by the Sanhedrin just like Paul recognized the authority of Rome throughout his life, yet they also recognized a greater authority who appointed individuals to serve His will within the framework of a government. Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 teach that Christians must view governmental officials as servants of God who minister on His behalf. God has delegated authority to civil leaders, but

⁸⁹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1992), 169.

⁹⁰ Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 232.

when those civil leaders push for more power, they are not pushing against another delegated authority, as in the position of sphere authority, they are pushing against God as the delegator of authority.

Because of the divine origin of the government, Christians have a responsibility to pay respect to and give submission to those in authority over them. This would also include a willingness to pay taxes to that very same government as a repayment to the government for the services rendered to its inhabitants according to Jesus' own words in Matthew 22:15-22. Jesus did not get into how the government was using its resources or whether or not the government was being fair in its taxation policy. Instead, Jesus focused on the reality that an individual owes everything to God as an image bearer of God, and part of that service to God is a call to submit to the authorities placed by God.

Some would like to place parameters on the call to submit to one's government by adding the word "legitimate" to the conversation. In his lengthy study on paying taxes, Rodney Reed's conclusion on whether or not a Christian should pay taxes includes a point on the "legitimacy of [the] governing authority" and whether or not the tax is fair or proportional for each individual. He then includes several other qualifiers which, according to his study of the Bible and church tradition, can then help determine the rightness of the tax before paying it.⁹¹ He does admit that Christians should pay all taxes most of the time, but his conclusion also leaves the door open to a lot of resistance against taxes based on each individual Christian's perspective on the situation. This places the decision into the hands of each person facing the situation instead of having a standard of truth established by God's Word. Of course, each Christian should use wisdom and

⁹¹ Rodney Reed, "Giving to Caesar What Is Caesar's: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective Part Two: Tradition, Reason and Experience," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 34, no. 1 (2015): 65-66.

discernment, but that wisdom and discernment needs to be based on a higher authority than one's own circumstances and logic.

While some Christians do put parameters on paying taxes or submitting to the government, the Bible does not present Jesus', Paul's, or Peter's statements as some type of contract between the government and the governed. Instead, one's submission to the state is based upon one's submission to God's commands and nature. These passages in the Bible were directed to believers and not directed to officials. This means that Christians are given the call to submit, for the glory of God, regardless of the degree to which the government takes care of its people or makes laws based on Scripture. If the government would pass a law or give instruction that would require a believer to sin against God, that Christian would have to respectfully disobey that law or instruction in order to continue to submit to the ultimate authority of God. Christians are to be holy as God is holy, and the government has no right to supersede God's status as the true Sovereign over all of creation. Complete allegiance and obedience is reserved for God. One's submission to the government stems from that complete servanthood to God, so Christians have the responsibility to refrain from actions which would be sin in God's eyes and to continue to actively live for God even if they are told to stop those actions by the governmental officials over them. However, a believer's actions, even in disobedience, must align with the transformational work of the Spirit in them in order to give testimony to the King of kings and Lord of Lords.

Biblical Theology for Submission to Civil Authorities

As shown through the historical survey previously mentioned in this dissertation, the church has struggled with the issue of how to biblically submit to civil authorities since the start of the church. Throughout the time of the church, some governments have been favorable, some have been antagonistic, and some have been relatively indifferent towards the activities of Christians. From the historical survey at the start of this dissertation, Christians have focused upon different biblical passages based on, in part, to their relationship with the government and based upon the particular issues of their day. These different starting points and circumstances have led leaders of the early church to advocate for various levels of interaction or cautioned any involvement with the government for the individual Christian.

A believer's submission to civil authorities is subservient to the primary and complete submission given to God. A part of this complete submission is the call to submit to the civil authorities placed into their positions by God, so submission to the state is an act of submission to God. However, there are inherent dividing lines which cannot be crossed without disrupting one's submission to God. These dividing lines are based upon God's commands and nature. Civil authorities do not have the authority to compel Christians to sin nor to keep them from following God's commands. As much as possible when not having to cross those dividing lines, a Christian's attitude and actions need to be in submission to his or her government as long as that submission to the state does not interfere with one's direct submission to God.

To form the biblical boundaries of this submission to the state, one must first understand the impact of Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:34-40. Here, Jesus summarized the entire Law to conclude that "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). A believer's dedication to the ways of God

must be complete and all-encompassing. This complete dedication would then require all other allegiances to be held to a lower priority compared to following God. This ordering of priorities is what Jonathan Leeman teaches when he wrote “there is no distinction between ‘public’ and private’ in God’s kingdom. Everything belongs to him, and so his rule is comprehensive.”¹ God’s priority of rule then establishes boundaries for a believer’s submission to the state in that one’s actions and attitudes towards the government and those occupying governmental positions must always honor God’s nature and commands.

Submission to God as Direct Submission

Romans 13:1 declares the truth that God is the One who establishes all other authorities. This is what is known as derived authority since civil governments receive their authority from God. Jonathan Leeman describes God’s authority as absolute which He uses to authorize others to operate as His delegated servants.² Since the civil authorities have their authority from God, the motivation to submit to these officials is based upon God’s command. This derived authority necessitates a depth of knowledge about God and His commands in order to be biblically informed when confronted with potential conflicts with one’s government. Due to the nature of derived authority, Anthony Forsyth explains that derived authority is inherently limited based on the one who provides the authority,³ and the limits upon one’s adherence to the government are based upon God’s revealed nature and commands as found in the Bible. These limits which are placed by God on the state’s authority form dividing lines for Christians. To cross these lines would be to elevate the state’s authority over God’s authority. Hence, to maintain these lines

¹ Leeman, *Political Church*, 157.

² *Ibid.*, 157.

³ Forsyth, *Caesar and the Church*, 37.

would be to embrace one's direct submission to God which supersedes the state's delegated authority.

The instructions in the New Testament concerning the need to submit to civil authorities contain both continuity with Old Testament instruction and discontinuity from the way in which Israel was governed. As seen through the examples of individuals who both preceded and followed the nation of Israel as a sovereign kingdom, Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah illustrate the fact that God has always been sovereignly involved with human kingdoms and has always expected His followers to submit to civil leaders as He places them within these circumstances. However, Israel itself stands in a different category than nations which were not given specific instructions from God concerning how they were to rule. Israel's existence and wellbeing were integrally connected with promises from God and the people's adherence or rejection of God's ways.

Sam Waldron points out that the New Testament passages on the nature of civil government represent a shift away from the integration of the "civil and ecclesiastical institutions" that will only be reintegrated with the coming of Jesus' earthly rule.⁴ Instead of attempting to recreate a government similar to Israel's government or attempting to govern based on Israel's Old Testament government, Christians should be focused on living a life that glorifies Jesus and testifies to others what it means to be transformed by the Gospel of Jesus while a sojourner on earth. Christians' citizenship primarily resides in heaven, so their testimony through word and action must properly represent their true Lord (Ephesians 2:19-22).

When one's government commands actions which would go against God's nature or prohibits actions which believers are commanded to do, a believer needs to disobey the

⁴ Waldron, *Political Revolution*, 111.

government on the basis of choosing to follow God instead of the government. To balance this requirement to follow God even at the expense of being at odds with the government, one must consider that Matthew 22:21 does teach the need for giving back to Caesar the things of Caesar, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 teaches the need to both submit to and honor one's civil leader. As a Christian conforms to the ways of God (Romans 12:2), this conformation to God's ways requires His followers to place themselves under the authority of the government. Because of this derived authority from God and the command to submit to the government authorities, Christians do not have room to reject government commands based on their own preferences for how a government should operate. To disobey a governmental order, Christians must be able to directly connect that act of disobedience to the state to a command of God.

One reason that Peter explains behind the command to submit to one's civil authorities is the impact that Christians can have on others by living in the reality that a Christian's eternal home is in heaven and not on earth. This is the instruction in 1 Peter 2:9-12 which precedes the section on submission to one's government. Through honorable living to the glory of God, Christians are able to use their good deeds to reveal the transformation that took place because of Jesus' sacrificial work on the cross. As Robert Webber stated, Christians "are the instruments of His kingdom and witnesses to it."⁵ As travelers in this world, Christians need to reveal the true King by submitting to His delegated servants who are to rule over others. Through godly actions, 1 Peter 2:15 states that Christians are able to silence "the ignorance of foolish people" by living within the freedom provided by God. As Peter continued, this freedom provided as a servant of God does not provide an excuse to Christians for evil conduct. In other words, one cannot simply

⁵ Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 189.

reject the government's orders with a godly, biblical reason behind that rejection. Christians must submit to the government as an act of submission to God.

1 Peter 2:13-17 is part of Peter's instruction to the elect exiles as he encourages them to get ready for action as obedient children who are seeking to live based on the holiness of God (1 Peter 1:13-16). This section calls on Christians to have a "self-controlled and attentive behavior" as they conform their lives to the holiness of God instead of their own passions.⁶ Peter is instructing the believers to look past their current struggles to see everything they do "in the light of future goals and an unseen reality" based on the work of Jesus.⁷ This is the theological framework in which Peter then exhorts the believers to adapt their views of and actions towards those in temporary civil authority over them. As Christians focus upon the work of Jesus and the promises of God, they must live in submission to those who are in positions of civil leadership over them, and the motivation is "for the Lord's sake" as they live based on God's instructions to represent Him to others.

These New Testament passages teach the necessity of focusing on serving God in one's life in all circumstances including how one interacts with the government. Since God is the delegator of authority and Lord of Christians' lives, one must follow God's command to submit to the authorities within the parameters of bringing glory to God. This New Testament message follows the trajectory established in the Old Testament through the lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah. They viewed their placements into positions of power as an act of God to testify of God. Within these positions, they served their civil leaders to the best of their abilities, but they also clearly established God's will and glory as their primary focus and motivation as they

⁶ Forbes, *1 Peter*, 37.

⁷ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 67.

served within their governmental positions. God is the source of all authority, so God's nature and commands must inform Christians concerning their interactions with civil authorities.

Theological Truths While Submitting to the Government

Submission to the State as a Secondary Submission

Since God is the one who delegates authority to others, the authority of the state over individual citizens within its borders is subservient to God's own authority. Instead of attempting to formulate a diagram of human authority, all earthly authority should be viewed as stemming from God and not designed by God to compete with other delegated authority institutions or offices. The issue should not be when one realm of delegated authority interferes with another realm of delegated authority. Instead, Christians must be primarily concerned when a human institution or office attempts to command people to go against God's laws or nature. Hence, submission to the state is secondary to God's authority, not in relation to other parts of a society but in relation to God's authority. Jonathan Leeman explains this concept by saying that "human rule – in the home, workplace, church or state – is contained *within* [emphasis original] God's rule."⁸ While there is fighting between those who hold delegated authority, the primary concern for each Christian should be how to respond when one authority attempts to disregard or go against God's authority. In the area of civil authority, one must constantly evaluate one's submission to the state against the nature and commands of God.

This evaluation between the state and God must be based upon God's standard of truth and righteousness and not based upon a Christian's preference for how a government should operate. Of course, the worldview of a government does have a large impact on the culture and

⁸ Leeman, *Political Church*, 161.

on its population. Robert Webber makes a connection between the need for believers to submit to God even when in a secular nation since that nations reveal part of the “cosmic struggle” which takes place between God and His enemies.⁹ A nation’s culture, and therefore laws, will reveal the gods of the nation, yet in spite of this reality, Christians are still called to live under God’s rule in every part of their lives while rejecting the gods of the age.

Because submission to the state is a response to one’s ultimate submission to God, one must not see the biblical command to submit to the state as an approval for everything that the state does and represents. This is part of the point that Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker make while analyzing the nature of submission. They bring into the discussion the fact that the Roman Empire was not a democracy, which many understand as one of the best forms of government in the modern age, but was oppressive and cruel in many ways. In spite of the nature of the Roman Empire, Christians were still to submit to the government based on the ultimate sovereignty of God.¹⁰ This means that a believer’s submission to the state is part of a believer’s act of worship to God. This is what Romans 12 and 1 Peter 1:13-21 teach before moving into the application of this concept in the realm of political engagement. For Christians, biblical submission to those in authority over them reveals a willingness to be conformed to the ways of God in every aspect of life.

Submission to the State as a Mindset

Both Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 carry explicit teaching and implied instruction as to the need to honor and respect those in positions of authority. Those who have delegated authority from God are worthy of receiving respect and honor. Both Paul and Peter preface the

⁹ Webber, *The Secular Saint*, 65.

¹⁰ Harrison and Walker, *Just Thinking*, 25.

instruction to give honor and respect with the call for Christians to be in submission to those in authority which reveals an aspect of what it means to submit to another. Part of submission would require this attitude of respect given to those who have been delegated authority by God. Giving one's civil leaders respect and honor is a large part of what it means to be in submission to the state.

Even when disagreeing with the government's choices, Christians can and should maintain a respectful attitude. This approach would stand in contrast to Nathan Busenitz and James Coates who assign motive to many governmental officials and show an antagonistic attitude towards those officials. In their introduction, they wrote that "this book is about government overreach – how civil authorities exploited a public health issue to stir up fear and shut down freedom."¹¹ They continue throughout the book with references to their perception of the officials' motivations and goals. Instead of assigning motive or implying intent,¹² Christians need to have an attitude of submission to show others a willingness to embrace the sovereignty and command of God.

The respect and honor to be given to officials is not based upon the righteousness of those officials. Instead, the respect and honor given should originate from a compliance with the instructions from God. Giving honor to those in positions of authority is a recognition of God's right to delegate authority and God's right to command the actions of His people as they represent Him to the nations. As seen in Daniel's respect and honor of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius, Daniel was able to take a stand for God's truths and disobey ungodly commands while still giving honor to his leaders. Nehemiah still worked within the laws of the Persian Empire

¹¹ Busenitz and Coates, *God Vs. Government*, 12.

¹² Busenitz, "The Grace Community Story" in *God Vs. Government*, 21.

while going about God's business of rebuilding Jerusalem. God's people in every age are instructed to show honor and respect as they are within positions of submission to those placed over them by the sovereign act of God.

Quiet and Peaceful Submission to the State

Paul offers further instruction in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 concerning a Christian's relationship with those in civil authority. These verses teach on the need to making intense prayers for all people with a special emphasis on making prayers on behalf of the Christians' leaders. For Christians who were living under an empire which was not on friendly terms with them, praying for their civil leaders, as suggested by Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, could have easily been neglected due to the oppression and pressure directed on them by the civil authorities.¹³ Through the power of prayer, Christians have the opportunity to influence government officials whether those officials are righteous or unrighteous. These prayers should not be done just during times of turmoil but should be regularly given as Christians asked for the Lord to be involved in the shaping of the nations.¹⁴

Praying for civil officials causes Christians to view the officials in certain ways. First, praying for others comes with a recognition concerning how God views all people. In 1 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul makes the connection of praying for officials to a recognition that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This understanding that God desires for all to be saved places officials into the same category of people for whom Christ died

¹³ Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, Jr, *1, 2 Timothy Titus*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 87.

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 84.

to save. Regardless of the level of persecution given by an official, Christians are to still beseech God on their behalf.

Praying for civil officials also recognizes God’s complete sovereignty over the nations of the world. Robert Yarbrough makes the connection between one’s prayer and the reality that God is still involved in the world’s events. As one prays for those in positions of authority, a Christian should pray in such a way as to ask God to enable His people to function as His disciples while making disciples of the nations.¹⁵ As Christians pray for the officials, Christians should also seek, through their prayers, to live for God as they pray for the officials. The Greek words ἡσύχιον, εὐσεβεία, and σεμνότητι are used to describe their religious devotion and purpose in serving the Lord in their lives while also embracing a moral code based on the Lord.¹⁶ This “peaceful and quiet life” is what is described as good in 1 Timothy 2:3 as Christians’ daily lives are used as a testimony of God to others.¹⁷

This desire to live a peaceful life, which is a testimony of the gospel to others, is connected with this call to pray for all people, including those in positions of governmental authority. Paul, who wrote both Romans and 1 Timothy, is writing from the same theological framework concerning a Christian’s responsibilities towards the government. In 1 Timothy, this instruction to pray for “kings and all who are in high positions” speaks of the need for a positive view of God’s sovereignty over the nations and God’s desire to save those officials, even if the officials are antagonistic towards the ways of God. A Christian’s goal, in this passage, is to live peaceably with the government so that one is able to properly represent God to others. This

¹⁵ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letter to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 148.

¹⁶ Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84.

¹⁷ Aída Besançon Spencer, *1 Timothy*, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 48.

would suggest that a Christian should not be attempting to fight against the government but to live in such a way as to focus on the ways of God while praying for God to be at work in each government official's life.

Christians are to submit to their civil government as an act of submission to God. This submission includes a recognition of God as the supreme authority over the whole earth who has delegated authority to others for the management of the various kingdoms of the earth. This submission also includes not only living in deference to God's delegated authorities but also given a proper level of respect and honor to the officials on the basis of God establishing them into their positions of delegated authority. The biblical authors provide examples of godly individuals giving honor to secular authorities, and these examples are further strengthened through clear teaching on this topic as well. Finally, 1 Timothy shows the need for Christians to commit to pray for and live peaceably with those in authority. Praying for the officials is part of what it means to represent the gospel to others as believers adapt their lives to the ways of God.

Applying Submission to the State for the Church and Individual Believer

Role for the Church

To view the church as the means to push back against the encroachment of other aspects of society is to miss the purpose of the church. Believers are to pursue righteousness and to evangelize the world for the glory of God. This is how Peter prefaced his section on being subject to every human institution in 1 Peter 2:11-12. The church is the bride of Christ and represents Him to the world while helping each individual member grow into Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). To become fixated on managing the civil government would abandon this purpose of the church. John MacArthur opines that "the church as a body must not abandon its true ministry

as a herald of the gospel in order to become a rival political force.”¹⁸ In his opinion, by focusing the church’s energy on managing the government or forcing a political viewpoint on others, the church would be setting itself up as a rival political entity.

While John MacArthur is rightly concerned with the church losing its God-ordained purpose, the church should have a voice in society espousing God’s nature and glory to the nations. Ephesians 6:12 states that the main battle taking place in this world is not between people but against the “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,” and the church is on earth representing God and equipping the saints for this battle. The church is to embrace its mission from God while doing its best to follow God’s instructions to it as the holder of God’s delegated authority in its care for the people of God.

When confronted with societal changes which trend in the opposite direction from God’s standards, the church should also be willing to continue to speak the truth regardless of public perception of that truth. As Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus, church leaders must continue to preach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Church leaders must be willing to teach biblical truths to the church of God so that believers are able to righteously navigate the currents of culture. This infusion of biblical truth aligns with Paul’s words to Timothy concerning the ability for all Scripture to speak to the issues of life as the Bible declares God’s expectations and commands to His creation (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Christians have been charged with reaching the world for Jesus, so Christians must be willing to take a stand on biblical issues while they are involved with their own neighbors and areas. Christians are not tasked with just the gospel, for the last words of Jesus in Matthew command for discipleship while using all that Jesus had taught His followers (Matthew 28:20). The world will shift its views of what is right or

¹⁸ John MacArthur, “Foreword” in Harrison and Walker, *Just Thinking*, xvi.

wrong, but the church holds the eternal standards of God and must represent Him to the nations so that all may hear of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the commands of their Creator.

Role for the Individual Christian

Throughout church history, there have been some conflicting views concerning the government which resurface during times of conflict between the state to the church. Regardless of the church's relationship with the government, Wayne Grudem points out that a Christian should maintain a positive view towards one's government since the government was ordained by God and given authority by God.¹⁹ This does not indicate that Christians should approve of everything that a government does, but it does refocus a believer's thoughts to the biblical teaching that God is the one who created the institution of human governments and uses civil governments to accomplish His purposes on earth. Christians should not inherently view the government as an enemy but a means by which God shows His sovereignty to the world. Instead of viewing the government as an enemy, one must consider Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 29:7 to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you." God has placed His people within the kingdoms of this world to be His representatives to the nations.

Christians hold the message of the gospel and are to proclaim this message to others. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christians have the answer to mankind's sin nature. Darrell Harrison and Virgil Walker key in on the impact of the gospel for society in their warning not to put one's trust in governmental officials,²⁰ yet they overemphasize this point to the neglect of the instruction that God's people are to seek the welfare of their earthly location while God keeps His people on earth. This is not to say that the gospel should be neglected or a secondary focus,

¹⁹ Grudem, *Politics*, 80.

²⁰ Harrison and Walker, *Just Thinking*, 71.

but one must be involved with others in order to reveal God to them. Christians are to be a voice for God's standards so that they may know of Him.

In the United States, this means being involved in one's community and using one's civil freedoms to show what it means to be transformed by the gospel. The focus should never be on maintaining one's civil freedoms at any cost but living in complete submission and dedication to the ways of God. Since the motivation to submit to one's civil authorities is for the Lord's sake, Christians are called to live to promote their true home of heaven. One way to accomplish this is seen through embracing the sovereignty of God in His call to submit to His servants in the government. This demands a willing embrace of one's order in society, as established by God and based on God's directives, and the giving of honor and respect to those who hold positions of delegated authority. Even when Christians are faced with persecution from those in the government, Christians' conduct must remain submissive for the glory of God. When confronted with situations in which the government demands Christians disobey God through action or inaction, Christians must choose to disobey the government, due to the ultimate submission to God, but must do so with a submissive attitude.

Confronting Unrighteousness in Society

Joseph Boot makes the observation that Christians around the world, including those in nations which have typically safeguarded religious freedoms, have been increasingly been pushed to the outskirts of society because of biblical positions which push against the streams of cultural change.²¹ Boot continues this train of thought by showing how culture in and of itself is not neutral in terms of morality. Culture will follow either God or a god of this world.²² Culture's

²¹ Boot, *The Mission of God*, 364.

²² *Ibid.*, 369.

basis for its beliefs is rooted in some type of religious system, and Christians must embrace this religious nature of society in order to then properly proclaim God. It is not enough to be content with getting political change enacted for one aspect of society and then letting go of one's involvement in society. Christians are to represent Jesus to every part of one's culture.

To accomplish this task of representing Jesus to others, Christians must be willing to be engaged with unsaved people, and Christians need to be developing their own understanding of God's Word as they live out the gospel in a public manner. To seek the welfare of the city around them, Christians need to be part of the culture and interact with the people around them. This requires knowing people and their struggles as they attempt to live life outside of their Creator's desires. As it relates to one's interactions with the government, Christians have the opportunity to be model citizens while telling others that they seek to be the best citizen possible because of what God has commanded and not due to a glorification of the state. When a believer has to take a stand against the edicts of the government, this confrontation, if done in accordance to the biblical understanding of submission, has the potential to advertise the supremacy of God as the believer humbly takes a stand against ungodly actions of the government. When someone's normal testimony is one of purposeful involvement and submission, others will take note of a Christian who has to stand against the tide of culture, so Christians need to make sure that the public stands they take are rooted in God's nature or commands and not just based upon one's perspective concerning how a government should function.

D. A. Carson addresses this need in modern Christian involvement in politics. He observes that "the advance of the kingdom of God seems to be substantially aligned with certain political goals, and when those goals seem within reach, the euphoria in the fundamentalist camp

is unmistakable.”²³ However, changing one political position is not the same as seeing growth in the church of Jesus. Carson prefaced this statement with an acknowledgement that Christians need to be more engaged with more parts of their culture,²⁴ and Christians must not be content to focus only upon one part of society but should embrace the all-encompassing call to doing good to all people on the basis on living a public life for the glory of Jesus.²⁵ Aligning with Jeremiah’s council to the Jews in captivity, God’s followers are to seek the welfare of the city in which God has placed them, and this must be done while following God’s commands and nature and while telling others about God’s nature (Jeremiah 29:7).

Christians should seek to influence the culture around them not on the basis of political talking points but on the basis of God’s revealed commands. Since all will give an account to God concerning their lives (Revelation 20:11-15), Christians are called to proclaim God’s message to the ends of the earth. Public testimony concerning God’s standards will inherently place Christians in opposition to their culture since unsaved people will naturally pursue lifestyles which are antithetical to the ways of Christ. Joseph Boot connects Colossians 1:20 to the mission of the church in that Christians must be actively engaged in their culture in order for the message of Jesus to do the work of reconciliation through the transformation enabled by the gospel of Jesus.²⁶ Paul’s instructions in Colossians indicates that just as the believers were once alienated from God so others have this chance to be reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Since Christians are primarily citizens of heaven and not of any nation on

²³ Carson, *Christ & Culture*, 210.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁶ Boot, *The Mission of God*, 366.

earth (Colossians 1:13-14), Christians are to use their interactions with others to proclaim God and to confront the gods of this world.

Confronting the beliefs of one's society comes with inherent risks as to both public perception of the church and the potential that Christians may be at odds with the laws of their country. Dietrich Bonhoeffer used his freedom of the pen to confront the evils in his government in light of the commands of Scripture, yet he also had to play a delicate balancing act in addressing his government. Sometimes, Christians will not have the opportunity to publicly confront societal sins, yet Christians should not be silent when God's nature or commands are being attacked. Christians must stand for truth, just as Daniel and his friends did in Babylon, by staying true to God's nature while also being evangelists in a dark world.

Addressing the issue as to how to submit to a president who was pro-choice, John Piper lays out eight ways to still honor one's president while proclaiming the truth of God.²⁷ These eight pieces of advice are in keeping with God's commands to honor and respect one's civil leaders on the basis of God delegating authority to civil leaders. Piper calls for Christians to acknowledge the image of God in man, acknowledge God's act of creating institutions like the government, honor every law that does not impinge on Christ's lordship, maintaining engagement in society, peacefully opposing injustice and unrighteousness, expect clear responses from leaders, and trust in God's sovereignty. In other words, Piper instructs Christians to be submissive to God's appointed leaders while resisting aspects of society which go against God's nature and commands. Even in this resistance, Christians must maintain a properly submissive stance towards the government in other parts of life. This political engagement may lead to a

²⁷ The following information is based upon John Piper, "How Pro-Life Christians Honor a Pro-Choice President," *Desiring God* (blog), January 21, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-pro-life-christians-honor-a-pro-choice-president>.

public confrontation of governmental stances, yet this public confrontation through speeches, letters, and other means should be viewed as part of a Christian's submission to the state.²⁸

Christians who seek to live out Jeremiah's instruction to seek the welfare of the city must be willing to be God's mouthpiece to declare God's truths to a lost world, but even this confrontation with one's culture must still align with the biblical instruction to be submissive to God's delegated leaders.

Not all Christians are called to a public declaration of God's ways to a society given over to the gods of this world, but all Christians are called to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20). This includes teaching these disciples the instructions of Jesus which will inherently conflict with the philosophies of the world. This conflict is represented in the battle instructions given in Ephesians 6:10-20 where Paul guides the believers in Ephesus to prepare for the spiritual battle which is raging in this world. Christians must be armed with the truths of God and be willing to engage with the world with the goal of planting the seed of the gospel of Jesus. Through the ministry of God's Word, people can then be transformed into the image of God and adopted into the kingdom of God.

Thesis Statement Revisited

A believer's submission to civil authorities is based upon one's complete submission to God and includes a believer embracing God's ordered structure for society in action, as long as one is not compelled to disobey God or dishonor His nature, and commitment to give honor and respect to those in positions of authority. Since one should give complete allegiance to God (Matthew 22:37), one must embrace the role within society that God has established for each

²⁸ John Piper, "When Do Christians Resist a Government That Kills Its Citizens?," *Desiring God* (blog), December 1, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/when-do-christians-resist-a-government-that-kills-its-citizens>, "Speak Out" paragraph 2-3.

person. This allegiance to God does not mean that one's civil government is serving rightly or composed of individuals who are inherently worthy of receiving honor and respect. In fact, Romans was written under the leadership of Nero over the Roman Empire. In spite of Nero's wickedness and antagonism against the church, God's delegated authority to those in positions of civil authority still requires Christians to submit in action and mentality to whoever holds positions of authority in the government. God is the one who established all authority, so one's submission to the state is an act of submission to God's supreme authority.

The focus of the biblical teaching on one's interactions with the civil government is on submitting to the government out of one's direct submission to the Lord. This call for submission does not indicate that a government is functioning according to its own laws. Instead, this submission is a testimony of one's trust in God's sovereignty and future justice over all of the nations. A Christian's responsibility is not to offer a check on those in authority, since the Bible does not include this type of function for believers. A Christian is responsible to God concerning his or her actions towards the government regardless of one's agreement or disagreement with how that government is functioning. Instead, Christians are called, in their complete submission to God, to submit to God's delegated authorities unless those authorities attempt to supersede God's authority. Therefore, the biblical indication is for this submission to be inclusive of all governmental orders unless a believer would be restricted from fulfilling God's commands, told to disobey God's commands, or forced to act in a way that is contrary to God's nature. Apart from these scenarios, a believer must be committed to submitting to one's government for the Lord's sake.

Christians should be involved in the function of their area of living as they are seeking the welfare of the area in which God has placed them. Using the wisdom and insight that God

has provided, they should vote and interact with others based on what they believe are the best choices for their area, yet Christians need to maintain the difference between trying to influence their area and submitting to their government. In the United States, people have freedom to attempt to effect change, yet this is not the case in many countries of the world. There comes a point in which all a believer can do is submit for the glory of God, yet even in this limitation, they can proclaim the supremacy of God by their actions and countenance as they trust in God in spite of whatever direction their country is headed. Also, if Christians have to disobey a command which would go against God's nature or commands, a Christian's disobedience is able to glorify God as that believer maintains an attitude of submission which is primarily focused on submitting to God. The nature of the government should not affect one's biblical foundation of submission to one's civil leaders. Instead, the nature and commands of God must develop a theology of submission that glorifies God through both obedience and disobedience.

Bibliography

- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011.
- Arnold, Eberhard, ed. *The Early Christians: In Their Own Words*. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1997.
- Augustine. *Augustine: Political Writings*. Translated by Michael Tkacz and Douglas Kries. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994.
- Baldwin, Alice Mary. *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*. London, UK: Forgotten Books, 2018.
- Baldwin, Joyce. *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978.
- Ball, David. "What Jesus Really Meant by 'Render Unto Caesar.'" *Bible Review* 19, no. 2 (April 2003): 14–17, 52.
- Balserak, John. *John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Battle, John. "The Sermon on the Mount and Political Ethics." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (February 2009): 48–56.
- Bauer, Walter, Frederick Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd edition. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Bayer, Oswald. "Martin Luther (1483-1546.)" In *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*. Edited by Carter Lindberg, 51-66. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Bell, James. *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
- Bird, Michael F. *Romans*. SGBC. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016.
- Black, Amy E. *Five Views on the Church and Politics*. Counterpoints Bible & Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. OTL. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.
- Bock, Darrell. *Acts*. BECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

- Bonomi, Patricia. "Religious Dissent and the Case for American Exceptionalism." In *Religion in a Revolutionary Age*. Edited by Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert, 31-51. Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1994.
- Boot, Joseph. *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society*. 2nd Edition. London, UK: Wilberforce Publications, 2016.
- Borggren, Erik. "Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 3:17-21: Paul's Call to True Citizenship and to Gaman." *The Covenant Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (May 2015): 26–40.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oxford, GB: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Books of the Acts*. Revised. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.
- _____. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. 2nd Revised edition. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.
- Brueggemann, Walter. "At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (1991): 3–22.
- Bruner, Frederick. *The Letter to the Romans: A Short Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021.
- Burrows, Mark. "Christianity in the Roman Forum: Tertullian and the Apologetic Use of History." *Vigiliae Christianae* 42, (1988): 209-235.
- Busenitz, Nathan, and James Coates. *God Vs. Government: Taking a Biblical Stand When Christ & Compliance Collide*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022.
- Byrd, James P. *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Robert White. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014.
- Campbell, Antony F. "Old Testament Narrative as Theology." *Pacifica* 4, no. 2 (June 1991): 165–80.
- Carpenter, Eugene. *Daniel*. In *Ezekiel*. Edited by Philip W. Comfort, 285-462. CBC. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010.
- Carson, D. A. *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Childress, James F. "Moral Discourse about War in the Early Church." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (1984): 2–18.

- Chisholm Jr, Robert. *From Exegesis to Exposition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1998.
- Chou, Abner. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018.
- Clement. *Clement of Alexandria Collection: 3 Books*. London, UK: Aeterna Press, 2016.
- Cole, R. Alan. *Exodus*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- Crimm, Nina J., and Laurence H. Winer. *Politics, Taxes, and the Pulpit: Provocative First Amendment Conflicts*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dauids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter*. 2nd edition. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Dawson, Jane. *John Knox*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Delling, Gerhard. “ὐποτόσω” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 459-462. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Deuel, David C. “Suggestions for Expositional Preaching of Old Testament Narrative.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 2, no. 1 (1991): 45–60.
- Draper, Jonathan A. “‘Humble Submission to Almighty God’ and Its Biblical Foundation: Contextual Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 63 (June 1988): 30–38.
- Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. New York, NY: Sentinel, 2020.
- Duche, Jacob. “The Duty of Standing Fast in our Liberties.” In Frank Moore. *Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*, section 2. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.
- Duguid, Iain M. *Daniel*. REC. Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2008.
- Durham, John I. *Exodus*. WBC. Waco, TX: Nelson Books, 1987.
- Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. Third edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012.
- Ericksen, Robert P. *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Fensham, Charles. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983.

- Forbes, Greg. *1 Peter*. EGGNT. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014.
- Forsyth, Anthony. *Caesar and the Church: A Biblical Study of Government and Church*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2022.
- Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2010.
- France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. TNTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.
- _____. *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Fuhr, Richard Alan, and Andreas Kostenberger. *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016.
- Garland, David E. *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2013.
- Garrett, Jeremiah. "Justice" in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. LBRS. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.
- Gleaves, G. Scott. "Evil" in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. LBRS. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.
- Goldingay, John. *Daniel*. WBC. Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 1989.
- Green, Joel. *1 Peter*. THNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *1 Peter*. TNTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.
- _____. *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010.
- Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*. TNTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.
- Haggard, Michael S. *Pastors Against Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Church Struggle in Nazi Germany*. New York, NY: 5 Fold Media, 2018.
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York, NY: Vintage, 2013.
- Hall, David W. "John Calvin on Human Government and the State." *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 122–35.

- Hamilton Jr, James. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Harrison, Darrell, and Virgil Walker. *Just Thinking about the State*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021.
- Hart, Patrick. "Theory, Method, and Madness in Religious Studies." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (2016): 3–25.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Howard Yoder." In *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, 207-222. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007.
- Healey, Robert. "John Knox's 'History': A 'Compleat' Sermon on Christian Duty." *Church History* 61, no. 3 (September 1992): 319-333.
- Heilke, Thomas. "The Anabaptist (Separationist) View." In *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, edited by Amy Black, 19-88. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- _____. *Ephesians in Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Philemon*, 1-137. CBC. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008.
- Hopkins, Theodore J. "Luther and Bonhoeffer on the Sermon on the Mount: Similar Tasks, Different Tools." *Concordia Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 33–58.
- House, Paul R. *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.
- _____. "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 67, no. 2 (2005): 229–45.
- Huey, F. B. *Jeremiah, Lamentations: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1993.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Janzen, David. "A Colonized People: Persian Hegemony, Hybridity, and Community Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah." *Biblical Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (2016): 27–47.
- Johnson, Jeremiah. "Fear God, Honor the King." *Grace to You* (blog), November 7, 2016. <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161107/fear-god-honor-the-king>.

- Johnston, Wade R. "We Must Obey God Rather than Men: The Lutheran Legacy of Resistance." *Logia* 25, no. 3 (2016): 19–24.
- Jones, Barry A. "Resisting the Power of Empire: The Theme of Resistance in the Book of Daniel." *Review & Expositor* 109, no. 4 (2012): 541–56.
- Kaiser, Walter. "Hermeneutics and the Theological Task." *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 3–14.
- _____. "The Modern Aversion from Authorial Intentionality and from 'Making Points' in a Sermon." *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 13, no. 2 (September 2013): 4–11.
- _____. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000.
- Kantzer, Kenneth, and Paul Fromer. "When Should Christians Stand Against the Law?" in *Dual Citizens: Politics and American Evangelism*, ed. Timothy Padgett, 450–458. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Kee, H., et al. "τάσσω" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Moises Silva, 847–848. Second edition. Vol. 4. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014.
- Keener, Craig S. *Romans*. NCCS. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009.
- Kidd, Thomas. *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010.
- Kitzler, Petr. "Christian Atheism, Political Disloyalty, and State Power in the Apologeticum: Some Aspects of Tertullian's 'Political Theology.'" *Vetera Christianorum* 46, no. 2 (2009): 245–59.
- Klaassen, Walter. "'Of Divine and Human Justice': The Early Swiss Brethren and Government." *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (1992): 169–85.
- Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation: Third Edition*. Third edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017.
- Kleinhans, Kathryn A. "Good Government and the Vocation of Citizenship: A Lutheran Perspective." *Dialog* 57, no. 2 (June 2018): 120–25.
- Koelpin, Arnold J. "An American Application of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Realms: The Relationship of Government to the Institutional Church." *Logia* 12, no. 1 (2003): 41–50.
- Koyzis, David T. *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

- Kruse, Colin G. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.
- Lalleman, Hetty. *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.
- Lambert, Frank. *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Larkin, William. Acts in *Luke & Acts*, 347-654. CBC. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006.
- Larson, Mark J. "John Knox, Tyranny, and Radical Resistance Theory." *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 23 (2018): 77–85.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *History Of Christianity: Reformation To The Present*. Revised. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003.
- Lea, Thomas, and Hayne Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy Titus*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.
- Leeman, Jonathan. *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018.
- _____. "Must Churches Follow Mask Mandates?" *9Marks* (blog), September 20, 2021. <https://www.9marks.org/article/must-churches-follow-mask-mandates/>.
- _____. *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule*. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.
- _____. "When Should Churches Reject Governmental Guidelines on Gathering and Engage in Civil Disobedience?" *9Marks* (blog), May 2, 2020. <https://www.9marks.org/article/when-should-churches-reject-governmental-guidelines-on-gathering-and-engage-in-civil-disobedience/>.
- Leeman, Jonathan, and Mark Dever. "A Time for Civil Disobedience? A Response to Grace Community Church's Elders." *9Marks* (blog), July 25, 2020. <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-time-for-civil-disobedience-a-response-to-john-macarthur/>.
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Lovin, Robin W. "Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (May 2016): 177–89.

- Lubert, Howard. "Jonathan Mayhew: Conservative Revolutionary." *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 589-616.
- Luther, Martin. *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. Stanford University. Accessed June 11, 2022. <https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Luther-ChristianNobility.pdf>.
- MacArthur, John. *1 Peter*. MNTC. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004.
- _____. "Christ, not Caesar, Is Head of the Church." *Grace to You* (blog), December 28, 2021. <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/1988>.
- _____. "Facing COVID-19 Without Fear." *Grace to You* (blog), September 21, 2021. <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/2254>.
- _____. *Romans 9-16*. MNTC. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994.
- _____. *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000.
- Marshall, Rosalind. *John Knox*. Edinburgh, UK: Birlinn, 2000.
- Mathewes, Charles. *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.
- Mathews, Kenneth. *Genesis 11:27-50:26*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2005.
- Mayhew, Jonathan. "A Discourse Concerning the Unlimited Submission and Non-resistance to the High Powers." *Founding.com*, March 21, 2008.
- McCartney, Dan, and Charles Clayton. *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*. 2nd edition. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2002.
- McClain, Alva J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2001.
- McDonald, J. I. H. "Romans 13:1-7: A Test Case for New Testament Interpretation." *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), 540-549.
- Michaels, J. Ramsey. *1 Peter*. WBC. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988.
- Miller, Gregory. "Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531.)" In *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*. Edited by Carter Lindberg, 157-169. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Miller, Stephen. *Daniel*. NAC. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Second edition. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

- Moore, Frank. *Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.
- Moore, Russell D. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2015.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Mounce, Robert. *Romans: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1995.
- Mullins, J. Patrick. *Father of Liberty: Jonathan Mayhew and the Principles of the American Revolution*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017.
- Murray, Scott R. "Romans 13:1-7 and the Two Kingdoms." *Logia* 30, no. 1 (2021): 7–14.
- Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005.
- Oberman, Heiko. *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*. Translated by Andrew Colin Gow. New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004.
- Olson, Roger. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999.
- Osborn, Eric. *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Revised and Expanded edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.
- Pace, Sharon. *Daniel*. SHBC. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2008.
- Peterson, David. *The Acts of the Apostles*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.
- Phillips, Richard. *John*. REC. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014.
- Philpot, Joshua M. "Was Joseph a Type of Daniel?: Typological Correspondence in Genesis 37-50 and Daniel 1-6." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 4 (December 2018): 681–96.
- Piper, John. "How Pro-Life Christians Honor a Pro-Choice President." *Desiring God* (blog), January 21, 2016. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-pro-life-christians-honor-a-pro-choice-president>.

- _____. “When Do Christians Resist a Government That Kills Its Citizens?” *Desiring God* (blog). December 1, 2017. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/when-do-christians-resist-a-government-that-kills-its-citizens>.
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1992.
- Prothro, James B. “Distance, Tolerance, and Honor: Six Theses on Romans 13:1-7.” *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (2016): 291–304.
- Quarles, Charles L. *Matthew*. EGGNT. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017.
- Reed, Rodney. “Giving to Caesar What Is Caesar’s: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective Part One: The Bible.” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33, no. 2 (2014): 123–44.
- _____. “Giving to Caesar What Is Caesar’s: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective Part Two: Tradition, Reason and Experience.” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 34, no. 1 (2015): 51–68.
- Richardson, Robert Lee. “From ‘Subjection to Authority’ to ‘Mutual Submission’: The Ethic of Subordination in 1 Peter.” *Faith and Mission* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 70–80.
- Ross, Alan. *Genesis*. In *Genesis, Exodus*. Edited by Philip W. Comfort, 1-258. CBC. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *A Christian Manifesto*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.
- Schreiner, Susan. “Martin Luther.” In *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, 109-128. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007.
- Schreiner, Thomas. *1, 2 Peter and Jude*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003.
- Scott, John Thomas. “On God’s Side: The Problem of Submission in American Revolutionary Rhetoric.” *Fides et Historia* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 111.
- Shao, Joseph Too, and Rosa Ching Shao. *Ezra and Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019.
- Shepherd, David J., and Christopher J. H. Wright. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. THOTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018.
- Sherwood, Aaron. *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, & Exegetical Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Skinner, John. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. ICC. New York, NY: Scribner, 1910.

- Smith, Steven. *Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah, Lamentations*. CCE. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2019.
- Snow, Robert S., and Arseny Ermakov. *Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. NBBC. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2019.
- Spencer, Aída Besançon. *1 Timothy*. NCCS. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.
- Sprinkle, Joe. *Daniel*. EBTC. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Steinmann, Andrew E. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.
- Stephens, W. P. *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thoughts*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Stott, John. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. BST. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984.
- Stroud, Dean G., ed. *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006.
- Talbert, Charles. *Romans*. SHBC. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002.
- Tertullian. *Tertullian Collection: 2 Books*. London, UK: Aeterna Press, 2016.
- Thompson, J. A. *The Book of Jeremiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Tinder, Glenn. *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.
- Van Tyne, C. H. "Influence of the Clergy, and of Religious and Sectarian Forces, on the American Revolution." *The American Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (1913): 44–64.
- Varughese, Alex, and Christina Bohn. *Genesis 12-50: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. NBBC. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2019.
- Volf, Miroslav, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz. *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.
- Waldron, Sam. *Political Revolution in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Biblical Critique*. Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2022.
- Waltke, Bruce K., and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2001.

- Walvoord, John F. *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 1974.
- Warner, Megan. “‘You Shall not do as They do in the Land of Egypt:’ Joseph and the Perils of Uber-Assimilation as Response to Involuntary Migration.” *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019): 43–54.
- Webber, Robert. *The Secular Saint*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.
- Weithman, Paul. “Augustine’s Political Philosophy.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by David Vincent Meconi and Elenore Stump, 231-250. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Wenham, Gordon John. *Genesis 16-50*. WBC. vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015.
- Wilkins, Michael J. *Matthew*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2003.
- Williamson, H. G. M. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. WBC. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1985.
- Wilson, Eugene A. “The Homiletical Application of Old Testament Narrative Passages.” *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 1 (1978): 85–92.
- Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan. *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019.
- Wind, Renate. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel*. Translated by John Bowden. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Winter, Bruce. “‘Seek the Welfare of the City:’ Social Ethics According to 1 Peter.” *Themelios* 13, no. 3 (January 1988), 91-94.
- Witherington III, Ben. *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter*. Vol. 2. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.
- _____. *The Acts of the Apostles : A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Wogaman, Philip. *Christian Perspectives on Politics*. Revised and Expanded. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Letter to Timothy and Titus*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics As Gospel*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011.