

***Question: What would Jesus say about slanderous attacks on national leaders with whom we may disagree?***

Most Americans are thankful for our democracy and the freedoms we enjoy, including freedom of speech. However, we need to understand that those freedoms can only be maintained when there is respect among our citizens for the authority of those who have been chosen to govern. By saying this, I assure you that my intention is neither to defend nor endorse any political agenda or position. Instead, I only want to encourage reflection upon the manner in which we express disagreement with anyone, especially with those in positions of authority in our world. This has become most apparent in our country during election campaigns.

Although the Bible does not endorse any one political system or form of government over another, it does teach Christians to submit to “the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established” (Romans 13:1; cf. Colossians 1:16). The apostle Peter stated: “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:13-15). Two verses later he added, “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17).

From these verses we see that disrespect for those in positions of authority is never justified, even when we do not agree with the policies and practices of those officials. For Christians living in the first century, this included respect for the role being played by immoral, tyrannical, dictatorial men like the Roman emperors Nero and Domitian who had thousands of Christians put to death. The only time the early Christians refused to obey the lawful authorities was when called upon to do something contrary to what God had taught them (Acts 5:29). When the apostle Paul was on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the high priest Ananias ordered someone to strike Paul in the mouth. Paul defended himself against this unlawful action with strong but truthful words. When he was accused of insulting God's high priest, he responded: “Brothers, I did not realize that he

was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people'" (Acts 23:5 quoting Exodus 22:28).

Of course, our democratic government depends on our right to exercise freedom of speech. We are not surprised when someone expresses disagreement with or disapproval of our government officials or their actions. To criticize those in authority is not wrong, but the manner in which we express disagreement can be wrong. When our criticism becomes slanderous accusations and malicious, disrespectful attacks upon the character of anyone, it crosses over the line.

Upon consideration of what the Bible says, I do not believe that Jesus would approve of anyone who demonstrates with hate signs, who circulates unproven slanderous accusations or who publishes disrespectful things against any of our nation's leaders—no matter what political party involved. I also believe that Jesus is deeply disappointed when this comes from those who claim to be his followers, even though they claim to do it in his name and for the righteousness of God. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ said: "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men" (Titus 3:1-2).

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