

Obeying Authority

Bible Study Starters

We designed Bible Study Starters to provide inspiration and guidance for your personal Bible study. Read the suggested passage, answer the included questions, and see where your study takes you!

ROMANS 13:1-10

(New King James Version)

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

STARTER QUESTIONS

1. What does the word *minister* mean in this context? Why do you think Paul referred to governing authorities as God's ministers, even though they don't all abide by God's laws?
2. Are there times when our governing authorities should be disobeyed? If so, when—and more importantly, *why*? (See the disciples' defense in Acts 5:27-32 and the response of Daniel's friends in Daniel 3:8-18.)
3. What if you don't agree with an authority figure's decision? Is that in itself enough reason to ignore or disobey it? Why?
4. If there is a time for disobedience, what does God expect our attitude to be toward those we are disobeying? (See Paul's response to the Jewish council in Acts 23:1-5.)
5. God instituted a hierarchy of authority in the Church (Hebrews 13:17) and in marriages (Ephesians 5:22-6:4). What makes a person easier or harder to submit to? When you find yourself in a leadership position, what can you do to make yourself easier to follow?
6. Additionally, during the times when your role is to submit and not lead, what can you do to be a more "profitable servant" (Luke 17:5-10)?
7. "Submission" can be a contentious topic in cultures that value personal freedoms, and yet Christianity means submitting to God as the ultimate authority. Do any of your own personal values or experiences make it difficult to submit to God (or any earthly authority)? Is there something about that value God wants you to change?
8. Paul calls love "the fulfillment of the law." How does obeying God's commandments help us express love to our fellow human beings?