

Peter, Paul, and subjection to evil government.



Let every soul be subject to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except under God. Now those which are, have been set under God, so that he who is resisting an authority has withstood God's mandate (Romans 13:1-2).

The following letter was submitted by a man named Oscar. This is not the man's real name. His real name is Gordon. The above photo is not his real photo, either. His real photo is on top of the next column. I have changed both the name and the photo in order to protect Gordon's identity.

Dear Martin, Part 1

If you are correct in your assumption about Romans 13:1-5, why didn't the apostles submit to the authori-



ties of the day themselves? In Acts, when the apostles were instructed by the Sanhedrin to no longer speak about Jesus, did they do so? In Acts 5:17-32, Peter does the opposite of what your interpretation of what Paul says in Romans 13:1-5. Since there is only one Holy Spirit, I doubt that he would tell Peter to do one thing and Paul to do another. Perhaps there is some middle ground.

Dear Oscar, Part 1

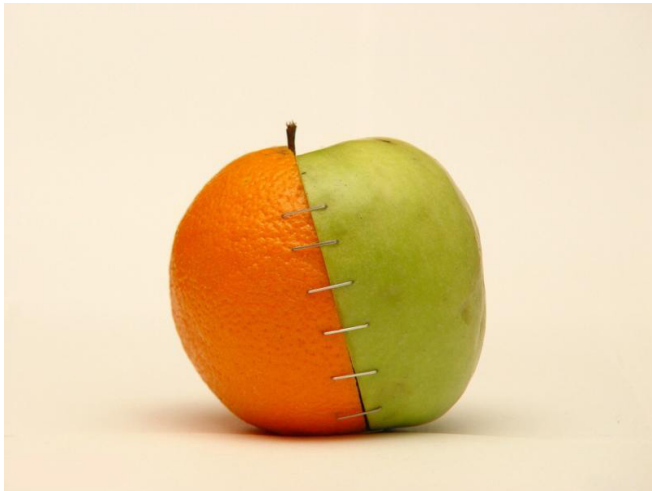
Thanks for the good question, Gordon—I mean, Oscar. The case of Peter and John must be answered, as this is the principle text called upon to justify civil disobedience.

First of all, I wish to challenge your thinking that the same spirit that told Peter to do one thing at Pentecost could never have told Paul to do another thing some twenty-five years later. That would be like saying that the same spirit that told Abraham, "Every male among you shall be circumcised," (Genesis 17:10), could not have said later, through Paul, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is availing anything, nor uncircumcision" (Galatians 5:6). Or that the same spirit that classified flying creatures among the unclean (Leviticus 11:13-19), could have later declared them clean

(Acts 10:9-16). Or that the same spirit that instigated the Aaronic priesthood, could have later discarded it for the priesthood of Melchisedek (Hebrews 7:11-22).

No doubt you would agree with me concerning all these examples. Your contention now, however, might be, “Yes, but God told Peter and Paul to do *contrary* things.” On to the next paragraph, please.

Is not circumcision contrary to uncircumcision? Is not law contrary to grace? Is not unclean contrary to clean? Is not the blood of animals contrary to the blood of Christ? We have just agreed that the spirit can do contrary things at different times. Slaughtering animals to cover sin was right for Moses’ day, but it is contrary to the present grace. Do the Scriptures, then, contradict themselves? No. God does different things at different times for different purposes. Each thing is right in its



own time. Circumcision for salvation was right then, but it is antagonistic to grace now. Noah’s ark was right then, but now it would be a useless heap of lumber.

A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

What you have not considered, perhaps, is the importance of that twenty-five years between Pentecost and the writing of Romans. Something so dramatic and so earth-shattering occurred within that span of twenty-five years that the apprehension of it will not only help you appreciate Paul’s actions in light of Peter’s, but will change the way you read Scripture.

When most folks attempt to rightly divide (Gr. *orthotomeo*, literally, “correctly cut”) the Word of truth, they lump it into “Old Testament” and “New Testament.” But this is as grossly inadequate and ridiculously

broad as a physician dividing the human body into “top” and “bottom.” If we are to be competent dispensers (or at least understanders) of God’s Word, we must analyze its finer details and distinctions.

THE LITERAL FULFILLMENT OF THE KINGDOM SEEMED DAYS AWAY

Peter and John defied the Sanhedrin during the Pentecostal administration. Relatively speaking, the kingdom of the heavens was said to be near at this time (Matthew. 10:7, Acts 3:19-21). In that kingdom, Peter and John will be the authorities. As the kingdom was said to be near, Peter and John were rightly living out kingdom truth. It was right for them—*then*—to defy the Sanhedrin.

“I went to the Cleveland Zoo last summer, and the lions were stubbornly refusing to lie down with the lambs.”

But wait a minute. What happened to the kingdom? I visited the Cleveland Zoo last summer, and the keepers had to keep the lions in a cage because the lions were stubbornly refusing to lie down with the lambs. In other words, the kingdom did not come. What happened? In a nutshell, Israel refused her King again (as presented by the spirit through the apostles; they had already rejected the ministry of Jesus) and Israel, as a national force, was temporarily cast away (Romans 11:15). This was a part of God’s plan that had never previously been known, but was revealed to Paul. The purpose of temporarily casting away Israel was to introduce the nations to a greater grace unknown to the sons of Jacob.

Paul writes to the Romans—

For I am not willing for you to be ignorant of this secret, brethren, lest you may be passing for prudent among yourselves, that callousness, in part, on Israel has come, until the complement of the nations may be entering (Romans. 11:25).

As Paul testifies, this new condition for Israel is not a permanent one. Even during this time of national callousness, God has left Himself a faithful remnant of Israelites (Romans 11:5), guaranteeing the salvation of the whole—at a later time.

Let's backtrack a little bit.

THE INAUGURATION OF A NEW ADMINISTRATION

In Acts chapter nine, as you know, the glorified Christ apprehended a Pharisee named Saul on the road to Damascus. This man's name was later changed to "Paul" to accord with his new career (his name means "pause"). The man would dispense spiritual blessing to the nations, apart from Israel during the God-inspired pause in their national aspirations. This event marked the beginning of a new administration of God that was not only apart from the kingdom of heaven that had been proclaimed in Jerusalem, but that was actually dependent on its rejection.



Israel is temporarily cast away.

Though it was not then appreciated as such at the time, this was the dramatic, earth-shattering event I spoke of earlier. No one understood at the time that it was God's intention all along to bless the nations during these long centuries of Israel's offense (Romans 11:12), when they would be temporarily cast away (Romans 11:15). We are favored of God to be able to see the big picture.

PETER'S MINISTRY GROWS WEAKER, PAUL'S STRONGER

That Israel was to be cast away for centuries, however, was the farthest thing from the minds of Peter and John at Pentecost. As I said, they expected the kingdom to come that week, or sooner. And, humanly speaking, it would have—had Israel accepted their testimony. But then where would that have left us? God hardened Israel to allow for this time period—and for us.

Do you remember the passage in Second Samuel 3:1 that reads, "David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually"? This is what we see happening throughout the Acts account, only it is the proclamation of the kingdom to Israel that is growing weaker continually, while Paul's ministry among the nations grows steadily stronger. This period is known as the administration of re-adjustment.

PETER ADJUSTS TO PAUL, NOT VICE-VERSA

By the time the secret administration is formally put into words in Paul's Ephesian letter (that the nations are joint enjoyers of a celestial calling with chosen Israelites—Ephesians 3:6-12), Peter is in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13) telling the Jews of the dispersion to be subject to authorities (1 Peter 2:13-25). *Say what?* Is this the same man who had defied the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:17-32? Yes. Why the big change? Because by this time, Peter himself understood that God had withdrawn the kingdom, relegating its literal fulfillment to an undetermined time in the future. He knew enough of what Paul was teaching among the nations ("Grace! Peace! Mind things above!") to recognize that a new administration had come, and that defying the authorities now would no longer be present truth ("Grace! Peace! Mind things above!"), but vain error.

Thus it remains today. Defying authority will again be the proper course (Daniel 2:44), but not until God once again takes up the political, earthly fortunes of His ancient people. As revealed through Paul, this will not be "until the complement of the nations may be entering" (Romans 11:25). We are still waiting for that complement.

In Paul's Roman epistle, then, we have truth for today during the time when Israel, as a national force, is set aside. A part of that truth, which Peter himself later acknowledged (1 Peter 2:13-25), is—

Let every soul be subject to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except under God (Romans 13:1).

Would you build an ark today? Would you preach circumcision today? Would you recommend the slaughter of sheep, today, for the covering of sins? I didn't think



so. Then do not try to force Peter's actions at Pentecost into the present administration of grace, when we are to be at peace with all humanity (Romans 12:18).

Dear Martin, Part 2

I will have to think about what you say. It does make sense. But I have another question: If Paul was in total subjection, as you say, why was he: flogged, imprisoned, beaten with rods, shipwrecked, stoned, exposed to death again and again; also in danger from: bandits, his own countrymen, Gentiles, in the city, in the country, at sea, and from false brothers (2 Corinthians 11:23-26)? Doesn't sound like the life of someone in total submission, does it?

Dear Oscar, Part 2

Yes, Oscar, it does. Paul was mistreated, not because he broke any laws, but because he, like his Lord, spoke and lived the truth. Generally speaking (and I'm sure you have noticed this), human beings dislike truth, preferring tradition.

Consider the case of Jesus Christ. Was He ever in-subordinate to the Jews? No. To the Romans? Never. Jesus Christ was sinless. He broke no law, be it Jewish or Roman. Jesus Christ said very plainly in John 15:25, "They hate me gratuitously." The King James Version reads, "They hated me without a cause."

If Jesus had broken even one Jewish law, the Jews could not have hated Him gratuitously, that is, without a cause. If Jesus had broken even one Roman law, the Romans could not have hated Him gratuitously, that is, without a cause. The Jews and Romans hated Jesus because of His total submission. Should we expect it to have been any different with Paul? As with the Lord, thus also with His slaves (Matthew 10:24-26).

IN CONCLUSION:

Don't I realize that, if I refuse to participate in the political process, I may lose my rights? How can I sit back and let my country go to hell? How can I sit here so calmly and so composed (you should see how calm and composed I am right now; okay, here is a photo; see below) while most of Christendom is at war? Don't I feel the least bit guilty?

Do I look I feel the least bit guilty?

Just because most of Christendom is at war doesn't mean that I must be. Sheer numbers don't make a thing right. They often make it wrong (Genesis 11:1-4). My standard is God, not the world. God is conciliated to the world now (2 Corinthians 5:19); so I must be. Jesus Christ did not lift a finger to reform Rome (John 18:36); neither will I strive against Washington. The apostle Paul did not wrestle with flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12); I will not outstrip him in zeal. A slave of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, bearing with evil (2 Timothy 2:24); I am a slave of the Lord.



As I was "roused together with Christ" (Colossians 3:1), I am to seek that which is above, and to be disposed to (that is, to be inclined to expend my energy toward) that which is above, not that on the earth (Colossians 3:2). As Christ will displace my senators and

congressmen at the coming of His kingdom (from above), I am forced to relegate those personages as belonging to "that on the earth."

As for these many "rights" that political Christianity (a redundancy, sorry) is sweating to defend, someone will have to find for me in God's Word where they are listed. I cannot find them. Instead, I am reading this: "Wherefore are you not rather being cheated?" (1 Corinthians 6:7). And this: "To no one render evil for evil...but conquer evil with good" (Romans 12:17, 21).

Maybe I should look harder for where it says to defend my rights, but I'm just too relaxed right now. —MZ





My son Gabe has directed and produced a short film about his brother Luke's adventure in New York City with his wife Mushroom and their two cats, Circle and Duer Bao. As many of you know, my son Luke had worked as an English teacher in China for four years when he met the fascinating and funny Mushroom (named for her hairstyle), asked her to marry him, and she said "yes"—or the Chinese equivalent thereof. Being the metropolitan types, they moved to New York City in January. My son Gabe moved in with them in February. Do you want to meet Luke and Mushroom and their two adorable cats? Do you want to visit the Big Apple without leaving your living room? Then watch this subtle, beautifully shot film by my very talented son:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoCZBr-h_PU

SLICK FORMAT FOR THE ROMANS SERIES

Subscriber Angela Marks has found a way to put the Romans Series into a very readable online book/magazine format. Check out this link:

<http://fliphtml5.com/bookcase/nobh>

Click on the link, then click on the magazine on the bookshelf, then click on "View," then page through the first 17 installments of The Romans Series in this very cool format. Angela says that she can do this for the rest of the series, as

well. I will let you know when that happens, and will put a link on my home page. Thank you, Angela!

MY NEW DIGS

I am now living permanently in the laundry room. I graduated from guest to resident last week. Fear not, friends. I like it. I have made it cozy with lamps from Wal-Mart. I am paying a fraction of the rent here for what I would be paying for one of the proper rooms. Many international travelers come and go through the other two rooms. There have been Brits here,



Brazilians, Koreans, Costa Ricans and natives of the Czech Republic. Someone from Poland will be arriving next week. The permanent hostess, Giuliana, is Peruvian. She has turned into a wonderful friend. I have bonded with her sister and her elderly father as well—all very warm people. I cannot

and will not live alone. It would be insanity and death to me to rattle around in an apartment by myself; I already know this. So you can see that God has provided a very workable situation for me. None of this, by the way, is my personal Plan A, but it is God's Plan A for me. He is quite a little Planner, that One. ■

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