

## Submitting to the Ruling Authority

In his commentary; on Samuel, John Calvin says, "And ye, O peoples, to whom God gave the liberty to choose your own magistrates, see to it; that ye do not forfeit this favor, by electing to the positions of highest honour, rascals and enemies of God." For Calvin the ideal form of government was the one chosen by the people. And the voters must choose their representatives wisely. But this does not mean that the elected government's authority comes from the will of the people. The recently elected Canadian government is not a mere necessary evil we have to put up with for the next four or five years. We may point to the flaws and failings of the government. We may question its policies; yet we must submit ourselves to its authority. We do so because it derives its authority from God. The public voted the government into power. But Scripture affirms that sovereign authority, rests in God alone, and that governments have derived authority. A government, then, is ordained under the sovereignty of God (Dan. 4:17; also Exod. 15;18; Ps: 2; Arts 4:23-31). Our Lord told Pilate, "You would have no authority at all over me...if it had not been granted you from above" (John 19:11). Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom, 13:1). Paul exhorts the believers to obey a purely pagan government whose ruler was the cruel tyrant Nero. Paul is teaching a profound political principle. We obey the authorities because of their office, not because we happen to agree with them or because of their upright character. We are to honour the office, not the person. Our Lord made this plain in His preaching. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt, 22:15-22). He said this to the Jews when they showed Him a coin with Caesar's image and inscription. The apostle Peter exhorts believers, "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...Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the King" (I Pet. 2:13,14,17).

We cannot live without structure. We need a government for the sake of order in a fallen world. Paul urges Christians to pray "for Kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim: 2:1,2).

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