

THE POWERS THAT BE

1. WHO should be subject to civil government?

“Let *every soul* be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God.” **Romans 13:1.**

2. By whom are the powers that be ordained?

“The powers that be are ordained of *God.*” **Same verse.**

3. What does one resist, who resists civil authority?

“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth *the ordinance of God:* and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” **Verse 2.**

NOTE — “That is, they who rise up against *government itself*, who seek anarchy and confusion, who oppose the regular execution of the laws. It is implied, however, that those laws shall not be such as violate the rights of conscience or oppose the law of God.” *Dr. Albert Barnes, on Romans 13:2.*

4. What do the Scriptures indicate as the proper sphere and legitimate work of civil authority?

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the *evil.* . . . If thou do that which is *evil*, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, *a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* **Verses 3, 4.**

5. For whom is law made?

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but *for the lawless and disobedient.*” **1Timothy 1:9.**

6. How are Christians admonished to respect civil authority?

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.” **Titus 3:1.** “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” **1Peter 2:13–17.** “For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon

this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” **Romans 13:6, 7.**

7. In what words does Christ show that there is another realm outside of Caesar’s, or civil government?

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; *and unto God the things that are God’s.*” **Matthew 22:21.**

8. To whom alone did He say worship is to be rendered?

“Thou shalt worship *the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*” **Matthew 4:10.**

9. What decree did King Nebuchadnezzar once make respecting worship?

“To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye *fall down and worship the golden image* that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up. And whoso falleth not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” **Daniel 3:4–6.**

NOTE — This decree was in direct conflict with the second commandment of God’s law, which forbids making, bowing down to, and serving images. It was religious, idolatrous, and persecuting in character.

10. What answer did the three Hebrew captives, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, return when asked by the king why they had not fallen down and worshiped the golden image, as he had commanded?

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that *we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*” **Verses 16–18.**

11. What did Nebuchadnezzar then do?

“Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage

was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: . . . and he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to *cast them into the burning fiery furnace.*” **Verses 19, 20.**

12. After their miraculous deliverance, what did Nebuchadnezzar say?

“Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.” **Verse 28.**

NOTE — By preserving these men in the fire, and thus changing the king’s word, God was demonstrating before all the world, through this greatest of then-existing earthly kingdoms, that, with the question of religion, civil governments can of right have nothing whatsoever to do; that religion is a realm outside the legitimate sphere of civil authority; and that every individual should be left free to worship, or not to worship, according to the dictates of his own conscience. The lesson to be learned from this is that, although ordained of God, civil governments are not ordained to direct or oppress men in religious matters.

13. How only did the envious princes and rulers under King Darius conclude that they could effect the downfall of Daniel?

“Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him *concerning the law of his God.*” **Daniel 6:5.**

14. To this end, what decree did they prevail upon the king to make and sign?

“That whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, *save of thee, O king,* he shall be cast into the den of lions.” **Verse 7.**

NOTE — Unlike the decree of Nebuchadnezzar, this decree forbade the worship of the true God, and was therefore in direct conflict with the first commandment, which forbids the

worship of any other than the true God. Like it, however, it was religious and persecuting in character.

15. How did Daniel regard this decree?

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, *he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*” Verse 10.

16. What was finally done with Daniel?

“Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and *cast him into the den of lions.*” Verse 16.

17. What did Darius say to Daniel the next morning when he came to the lions’ den?

“The king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” Verse 20.

18. What was Daniel’s reply?

“Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.” Verses 21, 22.

NOTE — Here again was demonstrated by a most remarkable miracle, wrought in the face of the greatest nation then in existence, that with the directing, prescribing, proscribing, or interfering with religion or its free exercise, civil governments can of right have nothing whatever to do; that religion is an individual matter, and should be left to the dictates of each one’s own conscience.

19. Before leaving His disciples, what command did Christ give them?

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15.

20. What counter-command did the Jewish Sanhedrin soon afterward give them?

“And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” **Acts 4:18.**

21. What reply did Peter and John make?

“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” **Verses 19, 20.**

22. For continuing to preach Jesus, what did the Jewish rulers do to the apostles?

“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and *laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*” **Acts 5:17, 18.**

23. What did an angel of God then do?

“But the angel of the Lord by night *opened the prison doors, and brought them forth,* and said, *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*” **Verses 19, 20.**

NOTE — Here once again is demonstrated the fact that men have no right to interfere with the free exercise of religion, and that when the laws of men conflict with the law and Word of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. God Himself has set the seal of His approval to such a course. John Bunyan was imprisoned for twelve years for daring to preach the gospel contrary to law.

24. Upon the apostles being called before the council again, what question did the high priest ask them?

“*Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?* and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” **Verse 28.**

25. What reply did the apostles make?

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, *We ought to obey God rather than men.*” **Verse 29.**

NOTE — “Obedience is to be rendered to all human governments, in subordination to the will of God. These governments are a recognized necessity, in the nature of the

case, and their existence is manifestly in accordance with the divine will. Hence the presumption is always in favor of the authority of civil law, and any refusal to obey must be based on the moral proof that obedience will be sin. . . . It is still true that obedience to human law often involves sin against God and man. There are cases so clear that no one can question the duty to refuse obedience. In all times and in all lands such cases have arisen.” “It is too obvious to need discussion, that the law of God, the great principle of benevolence, is supreme, and that ‘we ought to obey God rather than men’ in any case of conflict between human law and the divine.” “*Moral Philosophy,*” by James H. Fairchild, pages 178–181.

26. Who is higher than the “higher powers”?

“If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *He that is higher than the highest* regardeth; and *there be higher than they.*” **Ecclesiastes 5:8.**

NOTE — In attempting to defend the right of civil government to enforce religious observances by law, some still ask, “Shall we not obey the powers that be?” We answer, “Yes, when they are in harmony with the higher powers that be. God made His law for all the universe. He created man; He gives the bounteous provisions of nature, and holds our breath and life in His hand. He is to be recognized, His law honored, before all the great men and the highest earthly powers.”

27. Because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman in accordance with the command of King Ahasuerus (Esther 3:1–6), what decree did Haman succeed in having the king issue and send to every province throughout the Persian Empire?

“And the letters were sent by posts into all the king’s provinces, *to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.*” **Esther 3:13, 14.**

NOTES — By an overruling of Providence the carrying out of this terrible decree was averted, and Haman was hanged on the very gallows which he had erected for the execution of Mordecai. See **Esther 7:9, 10**.

God has placed the sword (civil authority) in the hands of Caesar (civil government) for the punishment of evil-doers; but when the sword is raised to slay the *innocent*, as in the case of the children of Bethlehem (**Matthew 2:16**); or to *enforce idolatrous worship*, as in the case of the three Hebrews (**Daniel 3**); or to *prohibit the worship of the true God*, as in the case of Daniel (**Daniel 6**); or to slay *all of God's people* as in the time of Esther; or to *enforce the observance of a false Sabbath*, as in the case of all Sunday laws, it is an *abuse* of civil authority, and not a proper or justifiable use of it; and God honors those who, under such circumstances, in the face of persecution, oppression, and death, remain loyal and true to Him.

“Government is never the gainer in the execution of a law that is manifestly unjust. . . . Conscientious men are not the enemies, but the friends, of any government but a tyranny. . . They are its strength, and not its weakness. Daniel, in Babylon, praying contrary to the law, was the true friend and supporter of the government; while those who, in their pretended zeal for the law and the constitution, would strike down the good man, were its real enemies. It is only when government transcends its sphere that it comes in conflict with the consciences of men

“But it is objected that the example is corrupting,—that a bad man will violate a good law, because the good man refuses to obey a wicked law. The cases are just as unlike as right and wrong, and any attempt to justify the one by the other is gross dishonesty. Unquestionably, the principle can be abused by the wicked, and so can any truth whatever; but the principle of unquestioning obedience to human law is false, and needs no perversion to make it mischievous. . . .

“It should always be remembered that the great end of government is human well-being, that law and authority are nothing in themselves, and that all their sacredness arises from

the uses which they serve. The machinery of government is valuable only for the work it does; in itself, it has no value. . . . The most grievous of all imperfections in government is the failure to secure the just and good result. . . . Injustice and oppression are not made tolerable by being in strict accordance with the law. Nothing is surer, in the end, than the reaction of such wrong to break down the most perfectly constituted government.” *“Moral Philosophy,” by James H. Fairchild, pages 184–186.*

God is above all earthly rulers, and His law above all human laws. He made us, and we therefore owe allegiance to Him before any earthly power, potentate, or tribunal. And this is saying nothing in disparagement of civil authority exercised in its rightful domain—civil things.