



# THE REVOLUTIONARY DISCIPLE

The Acts 4 and Romans 13 Paradigm

A Study That Describes a Nuanced Approach to Political Authority



# THE ACTS 4 AND ROMANS 13 PARADIGM

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*Complete this study with a group, one-on-one, or on your own.*

In Chapter 16 of *The Revolutionary Disciple*, “The Acts 4 and Romans 13 Paradigm,” we described a way for disciples of Jesus to approach the topic of governmental authority. We need a clear and nuanced approach on this topic because faithfully navigating faith and politics *can get complicated*. Plus, it’s easy to read just one portion of the Bible and make conclusions about this topic, when we need other Scriptures to help us better understand God’s heart. As the principle goes, “Let Scripture interpret Scripture.”

So we’ve created this study to help you (or your group) work through the paradigm we introduced in the book. This is not a comprehensive study, but it should help you better understand Acts 4 and Romans 13 on their own. Plus, we’ll help you bring the two passages together so you can better approach political issues as a disciple of Jesus and walk in the tension. Our goal is to equip you with a nuanced approach to humility in light of governmental authority. *This study pairs well with “The Three Buckets Approach” study, which is available at [TheRevolutionaryDisciple.com/tools](http://TheRevolutionaryDisciple.com/tools).*

Start by going through the questions below about Acts 4 and Romans 13. As you study these passages, try to look at each passage in a fresh way by examining its immediate context.

## **ACTS 4—5: PETER AND JOHN TESTIFY ABOUT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE**

The questions below start in the middle of the Peter and John’s story in Acts 4, so let us provide some context. Peter and John had been testifying about Jesus to the people in the temple, which started with Peter healing a crippled man. They paired this miracle with teachings about Jesus (Acts 3). As a result, the religious leaders, who functioned partially in a political role in that culture, were upset. So they arrested Peter and John and brought them in for questioning. Peter spoke to the religious leaders and finished by saying, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (4:13, NIV).

Read Acts 4:13–22, and then answer the following questions.

1. Why is this passage uniquely important for disciples of Jesus?
2. Read Acts 4:18–20 again. What exactly did the Sadducees ask Peter and John to do that opposed God’s instructions?
3. Christ had commanded Peter and John to preach the gospel in the Great Commission. And verse twenty says even more: they were *compelled to speak*. Why do you think Luke includes this detail?

The religious leaders released Peter and John after more threats. But the story doesn't end there. In Acts 5, they and the other apostles performed signs and wonders, and many people were healed.

Read Acts 5:17–41, which contains the rest of the story about Peter and John and the authorities. Then answer the following questions.

1. Peter repeated what he said in Acts 4 in Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than men!” Again, we know about the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20, but which verse in Acts 5:17–41 tells us the apostles obeyed the clear command of God here?
2. Were you surprised the apostles responded to being flogged by *rejoicing* (v. 41)?
3. How does their response to persecution inform how we can pray about the persecution of Christians and even our own potential persecution?

### Concluding Thoughts on Acts 4–5

What you read in Acts 4–5 reveals important details that are instructive for us today:

- God clearly commanded the apostles to preach. For that reason, they defied the governmental authorities by obeying God's clear command.
- The apostles faced the real consequences of their disobedience and did not run away or rebel.
- They were not afraid of possible persecution but boldly testified to the authorities.

Now, let's look at the other side of the issue by studying Romans 13, where the Christians in Rome were instructed *to submit* to the governing authorities.

## ROMANS 13

Again, some context will be helpful before reading the text. The history here is helpful: Emperor Claudius had expelled a large number of Jews from Rome in the late AD 40s due to their rioting, but after Claudius's death in AD 54, Emperor Nero made it possible for Jews to return to Rome. Paul wrote Romans in the mid to late 50s, just after the expulsion decrees were removed.\* When Paul wrote Romans, the Roman church was made up of Gentiles and newly returned Jews (allegedly rebels), and they were trying to figure out how they were to live under the Roman government. This plays into Paul's words in Romans 13.

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\* See N. T. Wright, *Romans* in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 396, 406.

In light of that, read Romans 13:1–7, and then answer the following questions.

1. What is the main point of this passage?
2. In light of the historical background mentioned above, why were Paul's words here important for first-century Christians?
3. According to Romans 13:1, what reason does Paul give for instructing that we must *submit* ourselves to the governing authorities?
4. According to Paul's specific words here, in what way specifically are we instructed to submit ourselves? Are we called to submit to everything every ruler commands of us?
5. What specific consequences does Paul warn about for Christians who rebel against governmental authorities (see vv. 2–5)?
6. What additional reason does Paul provide in verse five? Why does he add this more personal reason?
7. What does this passage *not say* that people have twisted this passage to say in your experience?

This passage has been wrongly used by many people in many ways to make it say what will justify their agenda. So we must be clear-minded about it. What is clear from this passage? We hope you've discovered that Christians were not to rebel but to submit to the authority of the government as their general posture—otherwise, they faced punishment. Yet it *does not say* we must submit to every decree. In some cases, the government asks us to sin, and we must stand up to that. But our default posture as disciples of Jesus is to submit to the government when we're not being asked to sin.

So how do we balance this with what we read in Acts 4? Is there ever a time we can resist—even rebel—against the government? Let's bring together Acts 4 and Romans 13 because Scripture doesn't contradict Scripture. How do we hold these two passages in tension? When should we stand up to the authorities and when should we submit? Chapter 16 in *The Revolutionary Disciple* provides our perspective, so we encourage you to review that chapter again now that you've studied Acts 4 and Romans 13 in more detail.

We'll conclude this study with questions for reflection and discussion about how to synthesize these two passages and apply them our lives today.

### **HOLDING ACTS 4 AND ROMANS 13 IN TENSION**

- In your own words, how would you describe the tension between these passages in Acts 4 and Romans 13?
- Read Acts 4:19–20 again. According to this passage, when exactly is it right to obey God over people?
- How does this not contradict Paul's words in Romans 13:1–7? Use specific verses and reasons.

## The Acts 4 and Romans 13 Paradigm

- According to Scripture, when should we say no to the government's regulations? When should we submit?
- Has your understanding of Scripture changed by looking at the broader context of these passages?
- What's your biggest takeaway from this study?
- What issues today does this paradigm help you navigate?

That concludes the main portion of this study. If you want to go further into how to handle disputable matters like this, then we encourage you to engage the other study we mentioned at the beginning of this study. It's called "The Three Buckets Approach," which is a study of Romans 14 that helps you form a framework in your mind for navigating this and other disputable matters. You can access this at [TheRevolutionaryDisciple.com/tools](https://TheRevolutionaryDisciple.com/tools).

