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If Only....

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If only my boss wouldn't be so rude and domineering, I would be more cooperative at work. "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle but also to those who are unreasonable" (1 Pet. 2:18).

If only my husband weren't so lazy and self-centered, if only he would learn to control his temper better, I would live with him. "...wives, be submissive to your husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior" (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

If only the brethren were friendlier and that preacher not so dry, I would go to church more often. "...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..." (Heb. 10:24-25).

If only I had more income and fewer bills, I would give a lot more. "...in the churches of Macedonia...in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:1-2).

If only my family would be more supportive, I would become a Christian. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me..." (Mt. 10:37).

Do you notice that what God expects of us, He expects regardless of our particular circumstances? Instead of excusing ourselves due to adverse conditions, let us commit ourselves to our Creator and Benefactor. If only we would be like Jesus, who said, "...I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn.5:30). He not only said it, But He also lived it — even to the point of death.



#NOTMYCAESAR

by David Diestelkamp

Jesus lived primarily during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius who ended his reign cloaked in paranoia, violence, and rumors of depravity and corruption. It was probably Tiberius's face on the denarius Jesus requested to be shown in response to being questioned about paying taxes to Caesar. "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" Jesus asked. They said, "Caesar's." "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus said to them (Matt. 22:17-21). Pay taxes to a corrupt government whose governors and soldiers would eventually participate in the murder of the Lord Himself? Yes.

The first Christians lived under the carnage of the cruel and bizarre reign of Caligula. When his reign was cut short by his murder, Claudius was little better. Aquila and Priscilla got to experience firsthand the emperor's ire when Claudius tried to solve his problems by expelling all Jews from the city of Rome (Acts 18:2). Comply with a megalomaniac emperor's unreasonable edicts? Yes.

Then it was Nero's turn to plot and murder his way to the throne in Rome. He is infamous for being vicious and cruel and for his harsh taxation. Nero's atrocities are legendary. Two thousand years later, the name Nero lives in infamy among Christians

for his persecutions. Here is what the apostles wrote at the very time that this man (described by some historians as a “brutal psychopath”) was reigning:

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Romans 13:1-7 - 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.

1 Peter 2:13-17 - Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men - as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Let me say again: these instructions were written during the monstrous despotic rule of Emperor Nero, the man who ascended the throne by murdering family and possible heirs to the throne; the man who kicked his pregnant wife to death; the man who openly married a man he had castrated; the man who persecuted Christians and blamed them for burning Rome. Pray for him? Yes. Be subject to him? Yes. Honor him? Yes. Pay your taxes? Yes. #NOTMYCAESAR was not an option that Scripture gave to Christians.

Politics have caused a vast divide in our country. Some Christians want to think that a president being elected by a suspicious or even illegal method means they need not recognize or honor him. Some conclude that a president who is immoral, accepts the killing of babies (abortion), or condones the sexually deviant is not “their president.” And some are judging the validity of a presidency based on their perspective on law, rights, taxes, foreign policy, or free trade. We must remember: the first century Roman emperors failed in all these areas; yet Christians were told to pray for them, submit to them, honor them, pay taxes to them.

It is legitimate to ask, “How do we honor the dishonorable?” Obviously, we are not being asked to call evil good and good evil (Is. 5:20). Without enumerating ways to honor in every imaginable case, I want to challenge each of us to examine what is in our hearts: what we say and what we post and share on social media. Is it expressing prayerful submission and honor to our governing officials, even when (and especially when) we strongly disagree with them? If you can’t think of anything positive about the elected official, that should be your challenge to let Christ live in you and prayerfully honor them. It’s hard, but “...this is the will of God...” (1 Pet. 2:15). We are not simply choosing a president; we are choosing whether we will do God’s will or not.

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