

# Do “No King but Jesus,” and “Honor the king” Contradict?

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As Christians, we recognize Jesus Christ as our King. Yet, undeniably, Peter instructed his readers to “honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17), meaning their earthly king. Paul also clearly taught that we should honor and pray for all in authority, including kings (1 Timothy 2:1-2; see also Titus 3:1 and Romans 13:1-8). As citizens of heaven, where Jesus only is our King (Philippians 3:20; Revelation 17:14; 19:16), what are we to make of this? Do “No king but Jesus,” and “Honor the king” contradict?

I’m writing this on 10 September 2022, two days after the death of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. I was stirred to this article by reading some of the most appalling verbal attacks by professing Christians against other Christians I have ever seen on social media. Almost invariably, these assaults were launched by Americans who have long identified themselves on social media as Christians. Those on the receiving end of these barrages were usually British Christians who had in any way posted something that showed respect or a sense of loss for their late Queen.

Most of the verbal onslaughts centered on the idea that, since Christians have Jesus only as King, anything that hints of accepting that Elizabeth was Queen or that Charles is King is a denial of Jesus Christ. These Americans take any show of respect for the Monarchy as outright heresy, and irrefutable evidence of the person as having never been a Christian.

Is recognizing someone as the king or queen of your land a heresy? Does the Bible teach that honoring or not honoring the king or queen is evidence of conversion? Or, does the Bible give us another sign that identifies us as Jesus’ disciples?

## **No King but Jesus: Jesus and Pilate**

As Roman governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate represented Caesar (at the time, Tiberius), and thus he exercised the power of the Roman state. When Jesus was arrested, He was brought before Pilate. Put in briefest summary, their conversation went this way: Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33). After asking Pilate where he got this idea, Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world.... my Kingdom is not from here” (John

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18:36). To clarify Jesus' position, Pilate again asked Him, "Are you a king then?" And "Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'" As a result, Pilate told the Jews, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:38).

Why did Pilate reach that conclusion? Because he realized that Jesus wasn't claiming to be an earthly king, and therefore wasn't a threat to Caesar. And he was right. To this day, the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven both stand in this world. The kingdom of the world is of the world, and the kingdom of heaven is not of the world but of heaven. Yet, both are in the world. But Jesus had one more thing to say to Pilate.

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*Additional reading:*

*"Why did Pilate find nothing with which to charge Jesus?"*  
<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/pilate-jesus-qa/>

*"Sorting Out the Two Kingdoms"*  
<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/two-kingdoms/>

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### **Honor the King: Pilate's Power**

After Pilate asked Jesus where He was from, Jesus didn't answer him (John 19:9).

Pilate therefore said to him, "Aren't you speaking to me? Don't you know that I have power to release you, and have power to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has greater sin."

John 19:10-11

Jesus was saying that the authority of Pilate, and, therefore even the authority of Caesar, came from God. In other words, although there are today two sorts of kingdoms on the earth—the heavenly kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom of kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers and so forth, they are both under the power of God. They should not be confused or conflated, but we should respect both.

As Christians, we know that we are not of this world; our kingdom is the kingdom of God. Our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are not really under the authority and laws of man's earthly governments. Yet, the Bible tells us to submit to the laws of the land in which we live.

### **The Children of God Are Free**

After Peter impetuously told the Jewish collectors of the didrachma temple tax that Jesus paid the tax, Jesus used the occasion to teach him and us a lesson (Matthew 17:24-25). He got Peter to see that the children are exempt (Matthew 17:26), but to avoid causing anyone to stumble, He and Peter would pay the tax anyway (Matthew 17:27).

The word "exempt" or "free," depending on the translation, is *eleutheros*. It's the same word Jesus used when He said, "If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). It is the same word Paul used in teaching that if a woman's husband dies, she is free from the law (Romans 7:3), using this as an analogy of our freedom from the law. And, it is the same word Paul used in saying, "So then, brothers, we are not children of a handmaid, but of the free woman" (Galatians 4:31), when teaching that we are not under the law.

Absolutely, brethren, we believers are the children of God and are, therefore, free from the law, including—since its authority ultimately comes from our Father—the laws of the land. But I wouldn't advise trying to tell that to a policeman!

### **Honor, Respect, and Love**

In fact, we should obey the laws of the land because, while we aren't under obligation, others would see our disobedience as a bad example and might become offended towards Christianity or stumble. Or, as Paul put it, "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are expedient. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be brought under the power of anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12), and, "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable. 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbor's good" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24; see also the principle of Romans 14).

Even if someone thinks it is a weakness to honor a monarch, the Bible tells us to be considerate of our weak brethren. Anyone who rails against someone for being weak and honoring the Queen or the King sins "against the brothers, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, [sins] against Christ" (1

Corinthians 8:12). On the other hand, honoring the Queen or King is not weakness, but obedience to Scripture.

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment.... Give therefore to everyone what you owe: taxes to whom taxes are due; customs to whom customs; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor.

Romans 13:1-2, 7

And,

Remind them to be in subjection to rulers and to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all humility toward all men.

Titus 3:1-2

Peter spells it out clearly:

Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to those who do well. For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Yes, brethren, the New Testament specifically tells us to "honor the king." This instruction isn't even tied to how good the king is. At the time Peter wrote, the emperor was Nero, one of the most debauched leaders imaginable. Nero killed his mother and turned Christians into human torches. Yet, Peter says, "Honor the king."

## **“No King but Jesus” and “Honor the king” Are Not Contradictions**

If Christians show honor to a king, queen, or some other leader, they are obeying the Word of God. Then, how dare those who claim to be Christians act directly contrary to such a clear admonition, and violate the love we are to have for our brethren, to throw their brethren’s obedience to Scripture in their teeth?

By what right do they judge others who are following this Scriptural teaching? How shameful that they mock dignitaries and slander and hurt the sensibilities of brethren who have chosen to honor and mourn the woman who served them as Queen for seventy years.

Putting a leader, a politician, a political party, or a nation ahead of Jesus Christ and His teachings is idolatry. Certainly, we’ve seen this idolatry in recent years as many Christians ran after a man or a political party while abandoning core Christian values such as love, grace, and mercy. But honoring or showing respect as the Bible instructs is not idolatry.

What these “Christians” forget is that the identifying sign of Christians is love for one another, and that Scripture specifically tells us to honor the king and others in positions of civil authority.

These people have insulted the leaders of a nation—in fact, a group of nations. They have also injured the hearts of the people of those nations, including believing Christians. But what I sincerely hope has not happened is that they may have given the impression to “these little ones” who believe in Jesus that Christians are loud-mouthed, loveless, braggarts braying like jackasses against dignities and having no compassion on those who mourn. This may have caused some to stumble. If so, of those who cause this, Jesus says, “it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35