

Title: The Choice of the Rebel: A Sermon on Submission, Rebellion, and God's Authority

Introduction:

"Rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." These are not my words, but the stark warning of the prophet Samuel to King Saul. They serve as our starting point today as we grapple with a powerful and often uncomfortable topic: the nature of rebellion. From the earliest pages of Genesis to the final warnings in Revelation, the Bible paints a clear picture of rebellion not just as a political act, but as a spiritual state—a state of defiance against the ultimate authority, God Himself. In a world that often celebrates rebellion, what does it truly mean to stand in opposition to God's order? Let us explore three facets of this monumental topic: Rebellion Against God, Rebellion Against God-Ordained Authority, and the Paradoxical Rebellion: Obeying God Over Man.

Thought 1: The Root of All Rebellion: Defiance Against God

Our first thought takes us to the very beginning, to the origin of sin itself. Rebellion is not a modern invention; it is as old as the fall of man. It is the desire to be one's own god, to set one's own rules, and to declare one's independence from the Creator. This is the primal rebellion, and it is the source of all our brokenness.

Scripture: Genesis 3:5, 11-13 (NIV) - "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil... He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?' The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate it.'"

Reflection: Adam and Eve's act of eating the forbidden fruit was a direct rejection of God's authority. The serpent's promise—that they would "be like God"—appealed to a core human temptation: the desire for self-determination apart from the Creator. Notice how they immediately began to shift blame, a classic symptom of a rebellious heart unwilling to take responsibility. This rebellion separated them from God and introduced sin into the world. Every

sin we commit, every time we choose our will over God's, is a reenactment of this original act of defiance.

Call to Action: Let us search our hearts today. Where are we acting like Adam and Eve, seeking to be our own gods, making our own rules, and then blaming others for the consequences? True peace begins not with rebellion, but with surrender to the One who made us and knows what is best for us.

Thought 2: The Order of God: Submission to Human Authority

The Bible is clear that rebellion is not just a spiritual issue; it has real-world implications for how we live in community. The second thought is about the uncomfortable truth that God uses human authority to maintain order and that rebellion against this authority is, in a sense, a rebellion against God's ordained structure.

Scripture: Romans 13:1-2 (NIV) - "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

Reflection: This is one of the most challenging passages in the New Testament. It calls us to submit to a government, even if we disagree with its policies, because the very concept of governance is established by God. Paul wrote this under the rule of the Roman Empire, a system that was far from perfect and would eventually persecute Christians. The point is not that rulers are infallible, but that order is better than chaos. God uses government, flawed as it is, to restrain evil and maintain peace. The rebellious heart, however, resents any authority, viewing it as an infringement on personal freedom.

Call to Action: This doesn't mean we can't speak out for justice or peacefully advocate for change. However, our motivation should not be the spirit of rebellion but the spirit of love and a desire for righteousness. We are called to be model citizens, praying for our leaders and honoring the order God has put in place, trusting in His ultimate sovereignty.

Thought 3: The Righteous Rebellion: Obeying God Over Man

The final thought presents a profound and beautiful paradox. The Bible, which so strongly condemns rebellion, also provides clear examples of when rebellion against human authority is not only permissible but required. This is the righteous rebellion—the moment when human law directly conflicts with God’s law.

Scripture: Acts 5:29 (NIV) - "Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings!'"

Reflection: Peter’s declaration to the Sanhedrin is a powerful and liberating statement. The apostles were commanded to stop preaching the name of Jesus, a direct contradiction to the Great Commission given to them by Christ. In this moment, they had a choice: obey the human court and silence the gospel, or obey God and face the consequences. Their choice serves as our ultimate example. The stories of Daniel defying the king's decree to pray and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow to the golden idol are other powerful illustrations of this principle. They were not rebellious in their hearts, but obedient to a higher authority.

Call to Action: This third thought is a critical balance to the second. Our submission to human authority is not absolute; it is conditioned on our ultimate submission to God. We are called to be discerning, to know God's word so well that we can identify when a human command crosses a divine line. When that moment comes, we are called to a different kind of rebellion—a rebellion rooted not in pride, but in unwavering obedience to our Heavenly King.

Conclusion:

So, what does the Bible teach about rebellion? It teaches that a heart of rebellion is a heart at war with God. It teaches that God desires order and has placed authorities in our lives to help maintain it. But it also teaches that our ultimate allegiance is to Him alone, and when human authority asks us to compromise our faith, our highest calling is a courageous and righteous rebellion—a rebellion of obedience to the one true God. Let us choose to live lives not of selfish rebellion, but of humble submission, for it is in submission to God that we find our true freedom. Amen.