

Is It Ever Right for a Christian to Disobey Civil Authority?¹

Contents

Prelude
Introduction
Wrong-headed Activism
Right-headed Activism
Comparing Israel with Other Nations
Confronting an Issue
Key Biblical Passages
Romans 13:1-7
1 Peter 2:13-17
Titus 2:11-3:2
Paul's Use of Civil Authority
Accepting Consequences
Citizens of Heaven
Summary Points and General Imperatives
Final Thoughts
King Saul vs. Jonathan
God Stirred Up
Appendix
An Essay: Some Government Is Better Than No Government
Quotations from Thomas Jefferson

+++++

Prelude

Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George the Third—
[at this point the speaker is interrupted with cries of "Treason!"]
may profit by their example. If this be treason, make the most of it.
—PATRICK HENRY, speech (1765)²

Treason doth never prosper: what's the reason?
For if it prosper, none dare call it treason.
—JOHN HARINGTON.
Epigrams³

The idea of treason appears several times in the Bible, denoting an attempt to overthrow the ruling authority to whom one owes allegiance.

1. In 1 Samuel 24:11, David assures King Saul that he has not plotted "treason" against the king.
2. In 2 Kings 11:14 (|| 2 Ch. 23:13) Queen Athaliah cries out "Treason! Treason!" when she discovers that the priests had crowned a new king, her grandson, Joash.
3. In Ezekiel 17:20, God warns the Israelites that He will severely punish them for "treason ... committed against [Him]."⁴
4. In 1 Kings 16:20, English versions translate the Hebrew term with either treason or conspiracy: Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the treason he committed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?⁵ What did Zimri do? (1) Conspired against King Elah (16:9, 16), then assassinated him (16:10). (2) He further assassinated all the house of Baasha, Elah's father, thus terminating the royal dynasty (16:11). (3) Finally, seeing he was about to be deposed, he committed suicide because of the sins which he had sinned in doing evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he had committed to make Israel sin (16:19).
5. In Esther 6:1-2 King Assuerus read in the royal archives how "Mordochai had discovered the treason of Bagathan and Thares the eunuchs who sought to kill [him]."⁶

From a legal point of view, treason is the crime that covers more extreme acts against one's sovereign or nation. Treason against the king was known as high treason and treason against a lesser superior was petty treason. A

¹ In popular circles, the subject of this paper is often labeled "Civil Disobedience."

² Merriam-Webster, *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1992) 36.

³ Merriam-Webster, *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1992) 36.

⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; 2002. Logos edition).

⁵ *The New King James Version*, 1 Ki 16:20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

⁶ Translation from the Latin Vulgate.

person who commits treason is known in law as a traitor. *Oran's Dictionary of the Law* (1983) defines treason as a "... citizen's actions to help a foreign government overthrow, make war against, or seriously injure the [parent nation]." In many nations, it is also often considered treason to attempt or conspire to overthrow the government, even if no foreign country is aided or involved by such an endeavor.

Outside legal spheres, some use the word "traitor" to describe a person who in reality or purportedly betrays his own political party, or nation. In a civil war or insurrection, the winners may deem the losers to be traitors. Likewise the term "traitor" is used in heated political discussion, typically as a slur against political dissidents, or against officials in power who are perceived as failing to act in the best interest of their constituents.

Merriam-Webster defines treason as 1. The betrayal of a trust: Treachery. 2. The offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance, or to kill or personally injure the sovereign, or the sovereign's family.⁷ The Oxford Dictionary defines treason as the crime of betraying one's country, especially by attempting to kill or overthrow the sovereign or government.⁸ The one so doing is called a Traitor: 1. One who betrays another's trust or is false to an obligation or duty. 2. One who commits treason.⁹

A distinction must be upheld between treason and a Christian's disobeying civil authority. The former seeks to overthrow and replace existing civil authority. The latter refuses to obey unlawful command or prohibition, leaving existing authority in place and, further, voluntarily accepting whatever consequences ensue from disobedience. The results are left in the hands of the Lord whether deliverance or death.

Introduction

Contemporary Christian advocates allowing for disobedience to civil authority are Chuck Baldwin, Larry Vance, and Lew Rockwell.¹⁰ John Locke, who exerted considerable influence on the Founding Fathers of the US, allowed for resistance to civil authorities when they usurp man's inalienable rights to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.¹¹

On the other side of this issue, in the pagan world, advocates for strict obedience to the state can be discovered as far back as Plato,¹² then subsequent writers such as Sir Thomas More,¹³ Thomas Hobbes,¹⁴ and Karl Marx.¹⁵ These men argued for a Utopian society with an all-powerful centralized government that in effect diminished personal initiative, a diligent work ethic, and the right of an individual fully to enjoy the fruits of his labors.¹⁶ Because Utopians exalt the state, resistance to civil authority is taboo.

This paper explores three preliminary issues: (1) Wrong-headed activism, (2) right-headed activism and, afterwards, (3) the matter of comparing Israel with other nations. In general, what is this thing called activism? Merriam-Webster defines it as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue ... (as the use of force for political ends)."¹⁷ When, therefore, we talk about Christian activism, we refer to doctrine and practice that approves aggressive action to achieve righteous ends. A Christian activist asserts himself to establish biblical principles in society, which can be done wrongly or rightly.

Wrong-headed activism

OT Examples

1. Miriam and Aaron (Numbers 12). Because Miriam, with her mouth, apparently took the lead in this disobedience to civil authority, God judged her with leprosy.
2. Korah, Dathan, & Abiram whom the Lord judged with the sin unto death. Following this judgment, the people turned against Moses and Aaron, blaming them for what the Lord had done (Numbers 16). God called them "rebels" (Numbers 17:16; cf. Jude 11).
3. The congregation of Israel "gathered together against Moses and Aaron" leading Moses to call them "rebels" (Numbers 20:2, 10). Nehemiah 9:17 labels that generation's conduct "rebellion," as does Psalm 95:8 and Hebrews 3:8, 15.

⁷ Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 2003).

⁸ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁹ Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 2003).

¹⁰ One may Google all three men for their websites and points of view.

¹¹ Levin, *Ameritopia*, 85-105.

¹² Mark R. Levin, *Ameritopia: The Unmaking of America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), 23-36.

¹³ Levin, *Ameritopia*, 37-49.

¹⁴ Levin, *Ameritopia*, 51-66.

¹⁵ Levin, *Ameritopia*, 67-82.

¹⁶ See especially Levin's opening chapter in *Ameritopia*, "The Tyranny of Utopia, 3-22.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh ed. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 2003). Logos edition.

4. When God had Saul anointed Israel's first king, some "despised him," though formally anointed by Samuel. 1 Samuel 11:25-27 calls them "rebels."

In sharp contrast to these examples of wrong-headed activism, we see that few, if any, in Old Testament times, had a better understanding and practice of submission to civil authority, refusing to participate in insurrection, than David.

And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you." (1 Samuel 24:9-13)

NT Example

When a Cohort,¹⁸ plus the temple guard, came to arrest Christ in Gethsemane, Peter became an activist, wrongly! He drew his sword and tried to detach the head of Malchus, one of the arresting party.¹⁹ Peter exercised vigorous action to achieve what he considered a righteous end: a defense of Jesus Christ's person. But Jesus' response makes clear that kind of Christian activism is unacceptable. For He said, *put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions (=72,000) of angels* (Matthew 26:52-53).²⁰

Believers should not act as Peter did on that occasion. We should not be quick to whip out our swords, so to speak, to exert vigorous action to help God. If God desired, He could launch 12 legions of angels into the world and crush all evil before we blink an eye. Christ further said to Peter, *how shall the scripture be fulfilled, that it must happen this way* (Matthew 26:54)? That is, "how can the plan of God unfold in history, if by your activism evil is not allowed to prevail for the time allotted?" What's the point? God uses evil—evil men, evil thinking, evil conduct in high political circles—to advance His eternal plan, even though that evil causes much human injury, pain, death, and emotional suffering. Thus we have no business becoming more holy and righteous activists than God in our attempts to promote His righteousness.

Right-headed Activism, i.e., Exceptions to Submission to Governmental Authority

Both Old and New Testaments give examples of acceptable activism (including warfare). Several examples follow chronologically:

1. To save the lives of Hebrew newborns, their midwives lied to the civil authorities for which God blessed them (Exodus 1:15-21).
2. Amram and Jochebed refused to give up infant Moses to Pharaoh's henchmen (Exodus 2:1-10; cf. Hebrews 11:23).
3. Moses defeated and executed Sihon and Og, existing authorities east of Jordan (Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11).
4. Joshua initiated repeated wars against the Canaanites, existing authorities west of the Jordan (Book of Joshua).
5. Rahab lied to Jericho's local authorities to spare the lives of Joshua's spies. Her loyalty to Israel's God led to the deliverance of her family when Jericho fell and made her an example for believers of functioning faith (cf. Joshua 2:1-21; cf. James 2:25-26).
6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship a false god; thus, they were punished in a fiery furnace from which the Lord delivered them (Daniel 3:1-30).
7. Daniel rejected a mandate of King Darius to cease praying; thus, he was put in a lions' den from which the Lord delivered him (Daniel 6:4-28).
8. Peter, John, and James disobeyed the Sanhedrin's command not to preach the gospel; thus, they received beatings, imprisonment, & martyrdom (e.g., Acts 4:13-31, esp. v. 19; also, 5:17-42, esp. v. 29).

Sidebar: Does God consider the lies of the Hebrew midwives and Rahab, thus their defiance of civil authority, to be sin? Both Old and New Testaments denounce failure to tell the truth (e.g., Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 12:22; Ephesians 4:25). Nevertheless, Scripture shows that sometimes to obey a higher command, a lower command must be sidestepped.

How can we test this? Note the fact of the existence of hierarchy among God's commandments; there are higher and lower moral laws and virtues:

¹⁸ A typical number making up a cohort was 600 Romans soldiers commanded by a Tribune. The incredible size of the arresting party exposes how serious a threat they saw Jesus to be to the established civil and religious order.

¹⁹ John 18:10.

²⁰ Sennacherib, an Assyrian king, learned the hard way that *one* angel is sufficient to destroy an army (2 Kings 19:35).

- Least of the commandments (Matthew 5:19).
- The weightier commands (Matthew 23:23).
- Greatest virtue is love (John 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:13).
- Degrees of responsibility and judgment (Matthew 5:22; Romans 2:6; James 3:1).
- Degrees of reward (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).
- Degrees of divine discipline (1 Corinthians 11:30).
- Only one sin is unforgivable (Mark 3:29).

Examples of setting aside a lower commandment to fulfill a higher commandment:

- To obey God Abraham intended to kill Isaac (sidestep 6th commandment, Genesis 22). The intent, what is in the heart, defines whether he disobeyed the 6th Commandment.
- Believers disobeyed civil authority to honor their highest Authority, the Lord (Daniel 3 and 6, and Acts 4:18-20).
- To avoid malnutrition, perhaps starvation, David and his men ate the Tabernacle's showbread that was forbidden to all but the Levites, yet were not guilty before God (1 Samuel 21:1-6; cf. Matthew 12:1-4).
- Every Sabbath the Levitical priests violated the 5th commandment ("keep the Sabbath day holy"), yet Jesus said they were innocent (Matthew 12:5).

Examples of breaking the standard of truthfulness to protect the sanctity of human life:

- God instructed Samuel (if caught) to misrepresent his intentions to King Saul lest Saul kill him (1 Samuel 16:1-3). Intent to deceive is tantamount to a lie, which on this occasion had unambiguous divine approval.
- Stratagems used in warfare to mislead—lie to—the enemy thus minimizing fatalities as well as defeating the enemy (Joshua 8).
- Another lie to protect human life besides Rahab and the Hebrew midwives is Jonathan's disinformation to protect David from Saul (1 Samuel 20).
- A modern example of wordless lying would be leaving on a light in your home at night to deceive a potential thief, making him think you are home when you are not. If deception to protect one's property is acceptable then it surely is fitting to tell a lie to protect an even higher priority, human life.

To sum up: The lone biblical exception to truthfulness is a lie to preserve the sanctity of life. Thus, God did not count Rahab's lie as sin. The sanctity of life is a higher norm than the sanctity of truthfulness.

Comparing Israel with other Nations

Case studies of civil/religious authority culled from Israel's history do not provide a perfect analogy for us because Israel's relationship with God was ratified by exclusive covenants. They possessed a political/national system that was a theocracy—a nation under the direct rule of God through revelation administered by prophets and kings. No other nation can say that. Moreover, the Lord linked Israel's covenant status not only to history but also to geography. They were citizens responsible before God to live in, defend, and perpetuate an earthly nation. To develop their country so that it might endure as a special treasure to God—a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*,²¹—the Lord granted authority to execute a "ban"²² on internal and surrounding pagan peoples. In this way, they would remove a cancerous threat to their holy (set apart) status. No other nation can say that.

Nevertheless, though not all things in Israel's national arrangement with God apply to Gentiles, Christians should not ignore Old Testament revelation where it touches on government and ruling authorities. Why?—because of what the New Testament articulates. So what about the Old Testament?

Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Old Testament (Tanakh) is a sourcebook from which we ought to draw principles and applications "to form a more perfect union." The Old Testament is God-breathed, written for our learning, and provides examples for us upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Consequently, we *should* carefully examine what it teaches about ruling authorities, and God's expectations of both leaders and citizens, for some things will apply and some will not to contemporary nations.

Though all other nations have a different relationship to God than Israel did and will, Christians are constrained to learn, apply, and adjust our attitudes toward our earthly citizenships. The USA is not in covenantal relationship with God, but what about our country? We are ruled by constitutional law (at least we are supposed to be!). Under our Constitution, we are a Republican government, electing representatives and senators to the legislative branch,²³ a president and vice-president to the executive branch, and jurists to the Supreme Court, or ju-

²¹ Exodus 19:5-6.

²² The "ban" was a divine mandate to exterminate a population because of its irreversible moral and spiritual degeneracy.

²³ Article I. Section 1. of the Constitution reads "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives." (emphasis added)

dicial branch of government. They become our rulers—those to whom we delegate authority via the voting booth. Though we vote for them,²⁴ they emerge into places of authority by God’s directive or permissive will to be His servants (Romans 13:1-4).²⁵

When on trial before Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea,²⁶ Jesus asserted the Father’s sovereign appointment of those in authority. For when Pilate said to Jesus, “Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). Because ultimately God appoints rulers, we are to be subject whether we like them and their policies or not, something stated several times by the apostles. For example, in an Empire under the early rule of Nero, Paul commanded:

Let every soul be subject (ὑποτασσέσθω) to the governing authorities ... for he [a governing authority] is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject (ὑποτάσσεσθαι), not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. (Romans 13:1, 4-5)

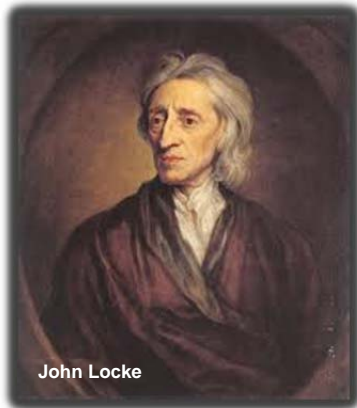
In the second half of Nero’s reign, after he had become a half-crazed Caesar, Peter wrote even more explicitly:

Submit (ὑποτάγητε) 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. (1 Peter 2:13-14)

The divine norm for Christian citizens is voluntarily to place themselves under their governing authority. And, believers need to be taught this; thus, Paul urges a pastor as follows: *Remind [Christians] to be subject (ὑποτάσσεσθαι) to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.*²⁷ Paul wrote Titus in the summer of AD 66, not long before his martyrdom and near the end of Nero’s insane reign. Obviously, the apostle is not suggesting that believers should obey only good rulers.

The standard is submission whether at the national, state, or local levels, but not without exception. The clear exception is that whenever human authority seeks to coerce a believer to disobey a revealed biblical command, a believer’s first allegiance is to the Lord. This brings up the question: What about disobedience to governmental authority when it functions at cross-purposes to divine directives for those in power?

Confronting an Issue



John Locke

John Locke (1632–1704) was an English philosopher and physician. Many regard him as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and as one of the first of the British empiricists, following the tradition of Francis Bacon. His writings influenced Voltaire and Rousseau. Many American Founding Fathers embraced his views on classical republicanism.²⁸

Locke was a profound thinker, a keen observer of human nature, possessing, for a non-theologian, an unusually broad understanding of biblical revelation and the concept of grace, even though the term itself is seldom used.²⁹ Let’s review two of his philosophical beliefs that influenced the Founding Fathers and observe how the Declaration of Independence (DoI) reflects those beliefs. We will then examine the two statements, evaluating them by scripture.

First, in the DoI we read: “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

The question we pursue is this: Can we validate biblically that government leaders derive their “just powers from the consent of the governed.” Locke’s presupposition is clear:

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what estate all men are naturally in and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think

²⁴ We vote directly for members of congress and the president, and indirectly through congress for members of the Supreme Court.

²⁵ Compare for example that elders in a local church, regardless of how they got there—election, appointment, *coup*!], etc.—achieve their leadership because *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers* (Acts 20:28).

²⁶ Luke 3:1 identifies Pilate as “governor” using the Greek term ἡγεμονεύω ... [meaning] to exercise an administrative position, *be leader, command, rule, order*, of the administration of imperial legates” (BDAG).

²⁷ Titus 3:1.

²⁸ The picture and paragraph is adapted from Wikipedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke.

²⁹ Locke’s works are quoted from Robert Maynard Hutchins, editor in chief, *Great Books of the Western World*; by John Locke: “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” “Concerning Civil Government, Second Essay,” and “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1982) 35:25-395.

fit, within the bounds of the law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man.³⁰ (italics added)

For background, remember that the original couple, being unfallen and endowed by their Creator with volition, experienced greater freedom to order their actions than any of their posterity. Yet, even in the Garden, they were under the authority of their Creator who limited their freedom with commands (e.g., cultivate the Garden, procreate³¹) and a key prohibition (do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil³²). Following the Great Deluge, the Creator further circumscribed man's freedom, instituting human government with the power of capital punishment.³³ Thus, we cannot say that man's freedom has ever been or is perfect in the sense absolute.

On the other hand, following a lengthy section defending that "in the state of Nature³⁴ every one has the executive power of the law of Nature" ... Locke concludes "I, moreover, affirm that all men are naturally in that state, and remain so till, by their own consents, they make themselves members of some politic society."³⁵

Consequently, Locke argues that the only legitimate form of government is that which is established by the consent of the members of society; that the only kind of government that can preserve the individual's God-given natural rights, including his liberty and labor/property, is a representative commonwealth in which there are three branches of at least three distinct responsibilities; that it must operate through just and impartial laws, which are applied equally to everyone in the society, including those in government; and that the extraordinary power of making laws must not be delegated to those who are beyond the reach of the governed.³⁶

This philosophical underpinning finds expression in the DoI as "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Locke further held that mankind exists in

a state also of equality, wherein all his power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another, there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another, without subordination or subjection unless the lord and master of them all should by any manifest declaration of his will set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.³⁷ [italics added]

The italicized portion is important. A crux question is, Does the lord and master, i.e., the Creator, in fact confer sovereignty on one over another? Passages such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 answer unequivocally, "yes," so long as we understand civil sovereignty to be delegated and not absolute. In addition, how should we respond to his assertion that for someone to claim sovereignty, he must possess "an evident and clear appointment?" It seems that the only objective criterion to which one might appeal to authenticate his possession of civil authority is after the fact. That is, he has authority, thus owns it because the authorities that exist are appointed by God.³⁸

To sum up: From a biblical perspective the bestowal of civil authority is, then, not by the consent of the people, but by divine appointment. As we will see later, however, for an existing ruler to exercise his God-given appointment, he must have the consent of the people. But it is one thing to source civil authority in the people, and another entirely different to source it in the Creator, which scripture does.

Second, in the DoI we also read, "...whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it ... [when Government] evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government." Locke states

As usurpation is the exercise of power which another hath a right to, so tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to; and this is making use of the power any one has in his hands, not for the good of those who are under it, but for his own private, separate advantage. When the governor, however entitled, makes not the law, but his will, the rule, and his commands and actions are not directed to the preservations of the properties of his people, but the satisfaction of his own ambition, revenge, covetousness, or any other irregular passion.³⁹

³⁰ Locke, *Original Extent*, 35:25.

³¹ Genesis 1:28; 2:15.

³² Genesis 2:16-17; cf. 3:1-3.

³³ Genesis 9:5-7.

³⁴ "The state of Nature" is a philosophical expression to denote man's natural condition *prior to* the existence of civil government.

³⁵ Locke, *Concerning*, 35:28.

³⁶ Levin, 1000.

³⁷ Locke, 35:25-26.

³⁸ Romans 13:1-4, esp. vs. 1.

³⁹ Locke, *Concerning*, 71.

He later adds that the difference between a good king and a bad king or tyrant “consists only in this: that one makes the laws the bounds of his power and the good of the public the end of his government; the other makes all give way to his own will and appetite.”⁴⁰ His reasoning is not limited to kings.

It is a mistake to think this fault is proper only to monarchies. Other forms of government are liable to it as well as that for wherever the power that is put in any hands for the government of the people and preservation of their properties is applied to other ends, and made use of to impoverish, harass, or subdue them to the arbitrary and irregular commands of those that have it, there it presently becomes tyranny, whether those that thus use it are one or many.⁴¹

Locke states that usurpation is “a right” whenever tyranny—whether by an individual (monarch, president), or a group (parliament, congress)—threatens, or in effect is at war with society. He is, however, pragmatic about usurpation. When addressing how a people should respond to the tyrannical acts of their civil leaders, he says:

[I]f ... illegal acts have extended to the majority of the people, or if the mischief and oppression has light only on some few, but in such cases as the precedent and consequences seem to threaten all and they are persuaded in their consciences that their laws and with them, their estates, liberties, and lives are in danger, and perhaps their religion too, how they will be hindered from resisting illegal force used against them I cannot tell. This is an inconvenience, I confess, that attends all governments whatsoever, when the governors have brought it to this pass, to be generally suspected of their people, the most dangerous state they can possibly put themselves in; wherein they are the less to be pitied, because it is so easy to be avoided.⁴²

The following lengthy quotation from Levin builds on Locke’s thinking.

Should government turn tyrannical, discarding its original purpose, it ceases to be legitimate. Locke declares, “The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property; and the end while they choose and authorize a legislative is that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the society, to limit the power and moderate the dominion of every part and member of the society. For since it can never be supposed to be the will of the society that the legislative should have a power to destroy that which everyone designs to secure by entering into society, and for which the people submitted themselves to legislators of their own making; whenever the legislators endeavour to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge which “God had provided for all men against force and violence.” In such circumstances “the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of a new legislative (such as they shall think fit), provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society. . . . What I have said here concerning the legislative in general holds true also concerning the [executive]. . . .” (19,222).

Locke also insisted that the right to revolt is not to be exercised imprudently. “[S]uch revolutions happen not upon every little mismanagement in public affairs. Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws, and all the slips of human frailty will be borne by the people without mutiny or murmur. But if a long train of abuses, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to people, and they cannot but feel what they lie under, and see whither they are going, it is not to be wondered that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavour to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for which government was first erected, and without which, ancient names and specious forms are so far from being better, that they are much worse than the state of Nature or pure anarchy; the inconveniences being all as great and as near, but the remedy farther off and more difficult” (19, 225).

“But if they have set limits to the duration of their legislative, and made this supreme power in any person or assembly only temporary; or else when by the miscarriages of those in authority, it is forfeited; upon the forfeiture of their rulers, or the determination of the time set, it reverts to the society, and the people have a right to act as supreme, and continue the legislative in themselves or place it in a new form, or new hands, as they think good” (19, 243).⁴³

Elsewhere the same political commentator says:

Locke writes, “The constitution of the legislative is the first and fundamental act of society, whereby provision is made for the continuation of their union under the direction of persons and bonds of laws, made by persons authorized thereunto, but the consent and appointment of the people, without which no one man, or number of men, amongst them can have authority of making laws that that shall be binding to the rest.

.....
Locke [i]s asserting that laws made by men or governments without the consent of the governed are illegitimate and no man is bound to them. Under these circumstances, men are not only free to resist such a force, but they are free to form a new government.⁴⁴

Building on Locke’s thinking, and to answer the question regarding disobedience to governing authority, the Founding Fathers of the USA stated the following in their DoI:

⁴⁰ Ibid.
⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² Locke, *Concerning*, 73.
⁴³ Levin, 101-103.
⁴⁴ Levin, 108.

“[W]henver any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it ... [when Government] evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government.”

To vindicate this affirmation of their intent to “throw off such government” in pursuit of independence, abolishing the perceived despotism of England, there follows a lengthy delineation (“train”) of 18 abuses by the King of England. The Founding Fathers then say that they (a) appeal to the Supreme Judge of the world and (b) “do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be free and Independent.”

To sum up: The Founding Fathers, as Locke, could not be clearer. When civil authority, in whatever outer form it takes, departs from its original purpose before God to preserve and protect the inalienable rights of its citizens, it forfeits its right to exist and the people are free to overthrow it. In fact, it is their duty to do so.

The Founders were not stupid men. They knew that King George would not take their severing of ties sitting down, but initiate war to keep what he believed was his to possess. Indeed, the Founders discerned there would be consequences and their final sentence of the DoI is “for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” (I read somewhere that many of the 55 signers of the Declaration did in fact lose their lives and fortunes, though not their honor—unless one looks at matters through the eyes of King George and his allies).

What says scripture about disobeying governing authorities? Does the belief system of the Founding Fathers better square with Locke or the Bible? Before we vindicate or censure such affirmations, we need a biblical standard by which to evaluate them. That’s next.

Key Biblical Passages

Romans 13:1-7

13:1	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἔξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν.</p>

Some argue that the expression “governing authorities” (ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις) does not speak merely of men in highly placed positions of political power, but of men who rule in keeping with God’s norms for government leaders. They base their argument on the term “governing” (<ὑπερέχω), which in some contexts may denote what surpasses another in quality or value.⁴⁵ From this they deduce that citizens need obey only those authorities who possess “a due measure of the qualifications requisite to the rightful exercise of the power of civil rule.”⁴⁶ Unrighteous authorities we may, even ought, to overthrow, which was the view of the Founding Fathers of the USA.

The term under consideration, however, does not support such an interpretation. BDAG points out that in contexts dealing with kings and civil rulers, the better concept is “to be in a controlling position, have power over,” or to “be highly placed”⁴⁷ with no qualification implied. Most, if not all, versions translate accordingly.⁴⁸

Some interpret the reference to “governing authorities” to denote “the institution of government; and designs to assert and does assert, that there is no authority properly exercised over men but that which God has established.”⁴⁹ If a ruler within the institution does not “properly exercise” authority, we may then dismiss him as one to whom we need subject ourselves: “He who sets up claims to dominion over [other men] must be prepared to show that he exercises an authority of that sort and of that character which bears the stamp and sanction of divine institution.”⁵⁰ Be that as it may, the argument concludes this way: “‘There is no power but of God,’ is merely to assert the general principle that subjection is due to civil government inasmuch as government is a divine institution.”⁵¹

Several observations defeat the notion that Paul has only an institution in view, not the individuals who comprise the entity and exercise authority.

1. They are “governing authorities” (ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις). The plural construction lends itself to individuals who rise above, surpass, or excel others in authority—not necessarily in moral excellence—emphasizing that some are highly placed over others (Romans 13:1a; 1 Peter 2:13; cf. 1 Timothy 2:2).⁵² If the principle

⁴⁵ BDAG, #3, who cites as examples Philippians 2:3; 3:8; 4:7.

⁴⁶ James M. Wilson, *The Establishment and Limits of Civil Government: An Exposition of Romans 13:1-7* (Power Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press, 2009. Originally published in 1853) 11.

⁴⁷ BDAG, #2, citing Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13. So Louw-Nida, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, and TDNT.

⁴⁸ NKJV, ESV, NET, NASB95, NIV84, RSV, ASV, etc.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Establishment*, 22.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Establishment*, 22.

⁵¹ Wilson, *Establishment*, 22.

⁵² Logos BDAG.

of the divine institution of government were in view, that would more clearly be expressed by a singular construction.

2. Where the abstract notion of authority (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ) is in verse 1, “the authority” (τῆ ἐξουσίᾳ, vs. 2) denotes a person with authority who has God-given freedom of choice, or the right to act, making civil or legal decisions that affect the lives of those over whom he rules (Romans 13:1b, 2, 3). An institution as such does not make decisions; the individuals who constitute the authoritative institution make laws.
3. Government leaders are appointed by God (ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμένοι εἰσίν).⁵³ That is, civil authority stands established by the agency of God; hence, the “Establishment!” (Romans 13:1c). Without such appointed rulers, the divine institution of government is simply conceptual; these authorities are not merely conceptual but “exist” (αἱ ... οὔσαι) by divine appointment.
4. Rulers constitute an ordinance⁵⁴ of God (τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῆ, Romans 13:2). God’s “ordinance” speaks of how civil leaders exist by God’s design for the orderly function and preservation of society through an ongoing exercise of civil authority. Leadership’s authoritative function is in view.
5. The term “rulers” (οἱ ... ἄρχοντες) denotes not an abstract idea, but identifies people in diverse spheres of authority implementing whatever delegated power they possess (Romans 13:3; Titus 1:9).
6. They are “ministers of God” (διάκονός ... λειτουργοί, Romans 13:4 and 6), or public servants of God not theoretically, but as living breathing individuals endowed with authority to serve. They exist to serve the people, not to be served. As servants, the Lord calls them to uphold man’s inalienable rights and freedoms. Under principles of righteous and just rule, they should not exploit and reduce a people to slavery and/or poverty by excessive taxation making them dependent on the state.
7. Rulers are sword-bearers and avengers (Romans 13:4), meaning that a state’s leaders serve God by bringing to justice the criminal elements of society who would destroy society, if left to themselves.

The apostle continues: “There is no authority except *from God*” (ὑπὸ θεοῦ, both here and the next clause). Wilson objects to understanding this clause to refer to “all and any existing governments,” saying “This cannot be.”⁵⁵ His evidence for objecting is Hosea 8:4, which reads *they set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge (yada) them*. Of the meanings within the semantic range of *yada*, Swanson⁵⁶ includes the following that best fits Hosea’s context: “choose, i.e., to select an object for special favor (Ge 18:19 [יִּיְהוָה]).” Accordingly, Hosea asserts that God did not select some, probably most, of the Northern Kingdom’s kings; the people presumptuously set them up. The only Northern Kingdom monarch the Lord clearly chose was their first king, Jeroboam I, whom He even promised an enduring kingdom if he would obey God’s commandments (1 Kings 11:29-38).

The point is that when we interpret Romans 13, rather than understanding it in absolute terms, we must recognize that some ruling authorities exist by God’s *permissive* will, not His *directive* will. The psalmist appears to understand matters in this light.

Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But the LORD has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the LORD our God shall cut them off. (Psalm 94:20-23)

Observations:

- “Throne of iniquity” is a figure of speech indicating rulers who rule by iniquity, not according to God’s norms. They use their legislative power to create evil law.
- Rather than seeking the happiness and good of their citizens, they resort to murder (“condemn innocent blood”) when expedient.
- The Psalmist does not instigate regime change, however, but seeks his defense in the Lord, his rock of refuge, waiting for the Lord to “cut them off.”
- Accordingly, neither Hosea 8 nor Psalm 94 provides guidance for treason.

⁵³ The verb is perfect passive periphrastic participle of ἵκσω whose normal usage discloses a point in the past when one assumed leadership authority with ongoing right to that authority. It is understood from other contexts that such authority lasts until God is pleased to remove the ruler (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

⁵⁴ BDAG: “διαταγή, ἡς, ἡ that which has been ordered or commanded, *ordinance, direction* ... of God Ro 13:2.” The idea is of “that [government with its ruling authorities] which God has arranged to accomplish His purpose” (Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Logos ed. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Establishment*, 22.

⁵⁶ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

The question that has to be addressed is “How does one discern whether God raised up existing governing authorities, or not?” Wilson insists that God “‘ordained’ civil government ... not by merely willing its existence, but by prescribing its duties, its functions, its end, and its limitations.”⁵⁷ His implication is that if rulers fail to execute their duties, and to remain within their boundaries, as spelled out scripture, then the people ought to overthrow them. But, knowing that no government and its rulers are perfect, we are left with the question, “How do we in time, space, and history rightly judge that we should force regime change?” Who is, or are, the judges that decide existing authorities have failed their God-given responsibilities and/or overstepped their God-given boundaries? Who may say, “Now is the time to initiate insurgency?”

It is clear that God has expectations for national leaders. The Lord weighed Belshazzar, for example, in the divine balances and found him wanting; thus, he was killed and his kingdom given to another. This Babylonian king’s failure?—absence of humility though knowing better, and arrogance by praising immaterial gods and not glorifying the true God.⁵⁸ He waged war on the true religion.

Wilson argues that for civil rulers to be from God they must “act agreeably to his will, which is, that they should promote the happiness and good of human society which Paul all along supposes them to do. And consequently, when they do the contrary, they cannot be said to be from God, or to act by his authority, any more than an inferior magistrate may be said to act by a prince’s authority, while he acts directly contrary to his will.”⁵⁹

Not so fast! It is not always so that God raises up national leaders who seek the happiness and good of society. It greatly dismayed Habakkuk that God would bring about regime change in corrupt Judah by the Babylonians, identified as *a bitter and hasty nation ... terrible and dreadful ... fierce ... they all come for violence ... they scoff at kings and princes are scorned by them ... then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offence, imputing this power to his god.*⁶⁰ Isaiah warns that one of the Lord’s disciplinary measures against a nation is that He will raise up to rule over them women and children resulting in oppression, insolence between generations, bringing evil upon themselves—a crushing of the people and grinding the faces of the poor.⁶¹ The point is that God raises up, not only good rulers and nations, but also evil rulers and nations to accomplish His purposes of judgment. These appointed to execute judgment hardly have in mind the happiness and good of those being judged!

In addition, Daniel 4:17 says that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men. “Lowest” is defined by context that repeats twice that the Lord “gives [civil/royal authority] to whomever He will,” or “chooses” (4:17, 25). In between these verses, Daniel predicts that Nebuchadnezzar will be reduced to the level of *the beasts of the field. And they will make you eat grass like oxen.* In fact, the Babylonian king will be given the *“heart of an animal”* (4:16). The prediction came true, and Nebuchadnezzar would remain as a beast “until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (4:32-33, especially 32b). The Babylonian king became like a beast, “the lowest of men,” a contemptible condition for a man. The LXX translates “lowest” (ἐξουδένημα) meaning an object of contempt.⁶²

Whence, then, or from what order have kings often been created? And when there was no greater pride in the world than in the Roman empire, we see what happened. For God brought forward certain monsters which caused the greatest astonishment among the Greeks and all the Orientals, the Spaniards, Italians, and Gauls; for nothing was more monstrous than some of the emperors. Then their origin was most base and shameful, and God could not shew more clearly their empires were not transferred by the will of man, nor even acquired by valor, counsel, and powerful troops, but remained under his own hand to bestow upon whomsoever he pleased.⁶³

What’s the point?—God does not raise up only good, noble, and just men to positions of authority. Sometimes He does. By His grace, he gave to America George Washington, a man of rare military, political, and Christian character, which had much to do with divine blessing on the founding and early decades of the USA.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Establishment*, 25. In footnote 6, on page 27, he further argues that for civil rulers to be from God they must “act agreeably to his will, which is, that they should promote the happiness and good of human society which Paul all along supposes them to do. And consequently, when they do the contrary, they cannot be said to be from God, or to act by his authority, any more than an inferior magistrate may be said to act by a prince’s authority, while he acts directly contrary to his will.”

⁵⁸ Daniel 5:22-31; note especially vss. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Establishment*, page 27, footnote 6.

⁶⁰ Habakkuk 1:5-11.

⁶¹ Isaiah 3:4-15.

⁶² Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel and Katrin Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2003).

⁶³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Da 4:17 (Galaxie Software, 2002; 2002).

⁶⁴ For a superlative read about our first president and his Christian foundation, see *George Washington’s Sacred Fire*, by Peter Lillback (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006). ISBN: 978-0-9786052-6-8.

So, how are we to know whether rulers practicing evil do so apart from God's purposes for one's country or not? Are evil rulers doing what they do as instruments of divine judgment on a nation, so that if we attempted regime change, we would interfere with God's national discipline?

Whoever rules does so because of God's initiative in national affairs; He raises a person into civil authority. This does not imply authorities cannot or do not abuse their power; they do as even a cursory examination of history reveals. The One who promotes, however, weighs them in the divine balances. When He finds them wanting, He judges them, as the Gentile ruler Belshazzar experienced.⁶⁵ Regardless, Romans 13 discloses that no leader, good or bad, would possess authority, if God Himself did not impart it.

The notion of God conferring authority is not new. The Old Testament often states that God promotes and demotes whomever He pleases in the world's political arenas. What is true of all men is no less true of national leaders for *in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28)—something true of good and bad citizens, as well as good and bad rulers.

- ✓ *The Lord . . . brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory* (1 Samuel 2:7-8).
- ✓ *By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth* (Proverbs 8:15-16; "Me" = wisdom, but the wisdom God gives, thus wisdom is a metaphor for God Himself who gives the wisdom).
- ✓ *Who says of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built, and to the temple, Your foundation shall be laid* (Isaiah 44:28).
- ✓ *Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings* (Isaiah 45:1).
- ✓ *I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me* (Jeremiah 27:5).
- ✓ *[God] changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings* (Daniel 2:21).
- ✓ *You [Nebuchadnezzar], O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all* (Daniel 2:37-38).
- ✓ *The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and] gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men* (Daniel 4:17; cp. vss. 25, 32).
- ✓ *The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses* (Daniel 5:21).
- ✓ Note also: *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes* (Proverbs 21:1).

The preposition ("*from* God," 2x in Romans 13:1) speaks of the agency or cause of the existence of ruling authorities. Being repeated two times emphasizes that it is by the Lord's sovereign working government leaders exist.⁶⁶ We may suppose that a majority of citizens casting ballots, or that a successful coup, is the cause of the powers that be. Not so, except from a myopic point of view. All authority is from God alone for, again, Jesus told Pilate You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11).

Government leaders are appointed⁶⁷ by God. That is, civil authority stands established by the agency of God. Hence, the "Establishment!" The perfect tense of "appointed" envisions a past event that may be an election, a war for Independence, a revolution, a military coup, or a succession because of death or resignation. Regardless of how someone attains a position of authority, God engineered the political events that put him in office. God also will sustain him in office for as long as He determines. The termination of one's civil authority—whether by a term's end, disease, or death—is merely the means God employs to carry out His plan.

From God further shows that the existence of civil authority is not an arbitrary invention of man, but ordained by God. We have an interesting play on words: "Let be subject" and "are appointed" are from the same family of verbs: (a) To "be subject" is to establish oneself under the state's authority and (b) to "be appointed" is to be established in an office.⁶⁸ Hence, we should voluntarily establish ourselves under divine establishment, though not without exception. Romans 13 deals with what is the rule, not the exceptions.

England has an instructive historical record regarding this matter of obedience to civil authority, revealing how subjectivity can seize one's thinking then actions. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the British government rocked backed and forth between Roman Catholic and Protestant control, each side claiming biblical warrant. Oxford theologians defended the doctrine of unlimited allegiance to the king, so long as a Protestant king was on the throne. When, however, James II (1633-1701) took the throne and sought to return England back under Vatican influence, the Protestant theologians gulped.

⁶⁵ Daniel 5.

⁶⁶ Logos BDAG.

⁶⁷ Perfect passive periphrastic participle of ὑποτάσσω (Romans 13:1).

⁶⁸ Logos BDAG.

Oxford resisted: it ate its own words, and took rank with the most decided adversaries of the Popish king in his assaults upon English Law and Protestantism. While power was in the hands of a court professedly Protestant, and zealous for the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Church of England, it was all well enough; but when a new government arose which sought to transfer all the posts of honor and influence in church and state into popish hands, these conscientious defenders of an absolute divine right took the alarm and refused to be bound by their own repeatedly asserted doctrines.⁶⁹

Those familiar with human nature are not shocked by the Oxford crowd's behavior. It is easy to espouse submission to authority when that authority meets with one's approval. The test of what one actually believes comes to the surface when existing authority does not meet with one's personal endorsement. We need first to be persuaded of what God's word teaches as regards submission to civil authority—never mind what our personal preferences may be! What does the scripture say whether we are present or not?

Romans 13:2-4	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>Ὅστε ὁ ἀντιπασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ, τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήφονται. Οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶ φόβος τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔργων ἀλλὰ τῶν κακῶν. Θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς· Θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστι σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. Ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ, οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· Θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν, ἕκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.</p>

The basic command of the first part of Romans 13 is lucid. There is no mystery, confusion, or doubt about what the Bible means when it says be subject to the governing authorities (13:1a). The imperative is for each citizen to arrange himself under civil authority. How natural is it for us to obey authority? The answer varies. For example:

- Children raised in homes where they were trained to obey the authority of their parents will blend into society and as adults more naturally obey civil authority. As a rule, they are not the ones we find populating penitentiaries, or receiving injections at the end of the Green Mile. This is not to say that 100% of all children raised in a godly manner will never take a turn at rebellion or become incorrigible. Deuteronomy 21 teaches otherwise.
- Children reared in homes unfamiliar with godly discipline, and who listened to a parent criticize existing authorities—whether in Washington DC, their city, or local church, will have far more brushes with the law. We should not be shocked when such children rebel against civil and/or parental authority, if those parents had a pattern of resisting authority.

But whether we more readily comply with authority, or tend to resist authority, it is natural thing for each man to do what is right in his own eyes. For that reason, the Holy Spirit gives two powerful reasons to subject ourselves to authority.

Reason #1: we should be subject for civil authority ultimately is from God (13:1b-2). The fact that authority derives from God has two implications, the first is that to resist authority delegated by God is to resist God Himself (13:2a). Remember that Jesus said to “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and render to God the things that are God’s.”

Governments have authority over what we do with our property and how we behave with one another, but our Lord clearly indicates they have no right to touch what God has put his image on, which is the spirit of man. In other words, Caesar has no right to command the worship of man or forbid his obedience to the Word of God. Rulers are under God; therefore they have no right to command men to do what God says ought not to be done or to command men not to do what God says should be done. These are the limits of governmental powers. Governments are not to enslave men, because men belong to God. Governments are not to oppress men, because men bear the image of God. What bears God’s image must be given on to God, and not to Caesar—just as what bears Caesar’s image must be given to Caesar, and not necessarily to God.⁷⁰

Otherwise, the principle is that we obey civil authorities at all times, with one exception. We do not disobey because our feelings are hurt. We do not disobey because a personal preference is disregarded. Neither do we disobey because we believe that we could draft a better law, or conduct foreign policy with greater wisdom. We may disobey only when it is a clear-cut case of obeying God, rather than man. Where it is right to disobey rulers to obey the Lord, our concern is to do what is right to please the Lord, leaving the consequences in God’s hands. Whether deliverance or death is to be our lot, we do what is right.

⁶⁹ James M. Wilson, *The Establishment and Limits of Civil Government: An Exposition of Romans 13:1-7* (Power Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press, 2009. Originally published in 1853) 4.

⁷⁰ Ray Stedman, *Discovery Papers Series*, “From Guilt to Glory,” vol. 2; catalog No. 3532, 2.

When avoiding sin is not at stake, to resist civil authority puts one in the unenviable position of resisting the ordinance of God (<ἄνθιστημι).⁷¹ What an insubordinate person puts himself in opposition to is God's "ordinance," that is, God's established divine institution for the orderly function and preservation of society. Paul does not condone the abuse of authority, which happens far too often in a fallen world. Yet, he confirms the principle of human government, that God raises up some people to exercise authority over others. That's why Psalm 82:6 calls the political and legal powers of the land "gods"—with a lower case "g." They bear the image of divine authority. A commentator said that "The clear implication is of a state of affairs, a structure of society, that cannot be changed, so that resistance is not only against God's ordering of society, but wasteful of time and energy."⁷²

Besides resisting God's ordinance, those who resist authority will bring judgment on themselves. "Judgment" is divine judgment administered through the function of the state in time, space, and history. Eternal judgment is not in context. Judgment is reaping what one sows in the present—a bringing down police and legal powers of the state upon one's head. "Those who so resist have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive."⁷³ Accordingly, the first reason to subject ourselves to the governing authorities is that they are ordained by God and resisting brings judgment.

Reason #2 for submission to civil authority is that rulers both praise and judge their citizens: For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil (13:3a). "Closely allied with this view of authority as derivative is . . . that the purpose of civil authority is to reward and encourage good conduct as well as to punish and inhibit evil (cf. 1 Peter 2:14)."⁷⁴

"For" (γάρ) introduces the second reason for Christian submission. Observe in verse 13:1 that what one there might construe in the abstract ("governing authorities" speaking of, say, the Magna Carta [1215], Lex Rex [1644], writings of John Locke [his writings occur ca. 1689-95], US Constitution [1787], etc.), the text now becomes explicit that individuals who possess authority are in view—persons to whom we render taxes and honor (13:7). The term "rulers" (οἱ ... ἄρχοντες) speaks of those who are first in prominence and political power. They rule in diverse spheres of authority. For example:

- Of Israel's high priest (Acts 23:5).
- Of those in charge of the synagogue (Matthew 9:18, 23; Luke 8:41).
- Of members of the Sanhedrin (Luke 18:18; 23:13, 35; 24:20).
- Of a judge (Luke 12:58).
- Of pagan officials (Acts 16:19).
- Of demons whose hierarchies resemble human political institutions (Matthew 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15).⁷⁵
- And as here of political rulers (also 1 Corinthians 2:6, 8; Ephesians 2:2 [NKJV = "prince"]; Revelation 1:5).

Voluntarily, we should subject ourselves to all levels of civil authority. This is less problematic when we understand that rulers are not a terror (φόβος), implying that civil authorities do not, as a rule, cause fear or intimidate law-abiding citizens. However, to protect the order of society, and the lives, properties, and reputations of individuals, the state should so act that evildoers are terrified of its power. Rulers executing their job profile acceptably before the Lord deal swiftly and justly with crime, thus becoming "[a terror] to evil [works]" (<κακός). That is, a terror to the perpetrators of works that are injurious, pernicious, or dangerous⁷⁶—in general criminal activity. Just, impartial, and swift punishment of crime promotes fear in the criminal elements of society and, thus, becomes a deterrent to crime, contrary to humanistic reckonings. When such punishment is not just, impartial, and swift then the deterrent effect is neutralized. When a potential criminal fears hurtful consequences, he is less likely to commit a crime than to go ahead with it.

When Paul says that rulers are not a terror to good works but to bad works, we may ask "Well, what about rulers who reward those who are evil and punish those who are good?" For example, the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries promoted unprincipled men, but threw Christians to the lions! One of the best commentators on Romans said:

The promise of v. 3 is absolute: the Christian, in so far as he is obeying the gospel, may be sure that the power will honor him. It may indeed intend to punish him, but its intended punishment will then turn out to be praise. It may take his life, but in so doing it will but confer a crown of glory. On the other hand, if he does evil, it must needs punish him—though it may be by shameful honors or a false security.⁷⁷

⁷¹ A break down of the verb is *anti* (against) + *histemi* (stand). Thus, in keeping with usage, it means to *set oneself against*, to *oppose*, or to *withstand* (Logos BDAG).

⁷² Dunn, *Romans*, 2:762.

⁷³ Dunn, *Romans*, 2:762 who quotes NEB.

⁷⁴ Logos Harpers.

⁷⁵ Logos BDAG.

⁷⁶ Logos BDAG.

⁷⁷ Cranfield 2:665.

This leads to the question *Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?* This asks from the standpoint of one's emotion, of not becoming frightened,⁷⁸ or fearful of the punishment civil authority may dispense for breaking the law. If you do not want to endure that nagging and fearful feeling that a police officer may pull you over and give you a ticket, then honor the speed limit. That is, Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. Peter challenges believers along the same lines: *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man . . . [and] to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.*⁷⁹

“Do what is good” is not only obeying the laws of the land, but also becoming a productive and useful citizen, rather than a human parasite who sponges off the labor of others, or steals from them. In this way, “you will have praise,” that is, the state's *approval*, or *recognition* (observe term at Romans 2:29).⁸⁰ This is public commendation⁸¹ in the form of promotion, awards, including being placed in positions of responsibility and authority. Good government rewards good deeds: Purple Cross, Congressional Medal of Honor, a Presidential Citation, etc.

So what about a person with civil authority?—“he is God's minister,” which is true whether a ruler knows it or not, whether he is a willing servant or not. Note that Paul speaks of “he,” not “it.” Contextual focus is on the individuals who possess authority, not an abstraction behind them, such as the Constitution. God put them in power to minister, to serve divine purposes in the eternal picture. In fact, Proverbs 21:1, affirms that *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.* Elsewhere we further see God manipulating national leaders to accomplish His purposes:

- Isaiah calls Assyria the rod of God's anger, the staff in His hand (Isaiah 10:5).
- Later Isaiah calls Cyrus God's anointed (Isaiah 45:1).
- And Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant (Jeremiah 25:9).

Rulers, Paul says, are God's servants to you, which is singular, not plural, isolating each individual⁸² within a national entity to assure him that God designed government for his good. What kind of “good”?

In the administration of public justice, the determining of quarrels, the protecting of the innocent, the righting of the wronged, the punishing of offenders, and the preserving of national peace and order, that every man may not do what is right in his own eyes—in these things it is that magistrates act as God's ministers. As the killing of an inferior magistrate, while he is actually doing his duty, is accounted treason against the prince, so the resisting of any magistrates in the discharge of these duties of their place is the resisting of an ordinance of God.⁸³

The phrase that rulers minister to you [law abiding citizens] for good identifies the first of two purposes of human government in the divine scheme. They exist to protect and promote the common good. In no way can we construe “good,” in the larger theological context of scripture, as providing for citizens from the womb to the tomb, thus (a) diminishing personal responsibility to work for a living,⁸⁴ and (b) vindicating the dispossession of successful citizens of their affluence to care for those able, but unwilling, to support themselves.

Not all are law abiding, so Paul continues, but if you do evil, be afraid. This is a no-brainer, is it not? If you insist on driving 85 in a 55 MPH zone, be afraid. Keep looking in the rear view mirror. Break out in a cold sweat and watch your palms perspire as you speed by a black-and-white. Experience the tension that grips your neck and shoulders for he does not bear the sword in vain. A better translation would be “he does not wear⁸⁵ the sword in vain,” speaking of how the sword symbolizes the power it represents. The point is that governments are “to protect us from attack from without and from crime from within.”⁸⁶ The sword is a Roman two-edged sword, cutting in two directions.⁸⁷

- It denotes the right of capital punishment—a function of authority within one's boundaries. This is the sword's use to terminate capital offenders.
- It denotes the right to maintain a standing military—a function that enables the state to defend against foreign aggression. This is the sword's use via military power.

Locke says this about government's use of the “sword”:

⁷⁸ Logos BDAG.

⁷⁹ 1 Peter 2:13-14.

⁸⁰ Logos BDAG.

⁸¹ Dunn 2:762.

⁸² Cranfield 2:666.

⁸³ Logos Matthew Henry.

⁸⁴ 1 Thessalonians 3 teaches that if an able-bodied person will not work, then we are not obligated to feed him.

⁸⁵ Logos BDAG.

⁸⁶ Stedman, 2.

⁸⁷ See Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:666-67.

Political power then, I take to be a right of making laws, with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good.⁸⁸

The power of the sword is the divinely delegated right of life and death, whether a needle in the arm within our national boundaries, or on a terrible and bloody battlefield overseas. A commentator says: “The sword is introduced as the symbol of penal authority, of the power legitimately possessed by the state to coerce recalcitrant citizens in its effort to maintain order.”⁸⁹ Another commentator says:

They bear the sword; not only the sword of war, but the sword of justice. . . . Such is the power of sin and corruption that many will not be restrained from the greatest enormities, and such as are most pernicious to human society, by any regard to the law of God and nature or the wrath to come; but only by the fear of temporal punishments, which the willfulness and perverseness of degenerate mankind have made necessary. Hence it appears that laws with penalties for the lawless and disobedient (1 Tim. 1:9) must be constituted . . . When men are become such beasts, such ravenous beasts, one to another, they must be dealt with accordingly, taken and destroyed in terrorem—to deter others.⁹⁰

A properly functioning state instills terror in the criminal element of society for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. This identifies the second of the two overriding purposes of human government in the plan of God. To be an avenger to execute wrath is not a negative notion, speaking of an evil, or diabolical, exercise of authority. “An avenger” is a positive notion speaking of a ruler who brings to conclusion a legal process.⁹¹ The avenger is the one who metes out justice, fitting the punishment to the crime. Scripture calls that justice wrath; it is God’s wrath because the state is God’s agent. “The state thus is charged with a function which has been explicitly forbidden to the Christian (12:17a, 29).”⁹²

Romans 13:5-7	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>Διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν. Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε, λειτουργοὶ γὰρ Θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες. Ἀπόδοτε οὖν πᾶσι τὰς ὀφειλάς· τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν.</p>

Two applications of submission to civil authority follow. Application #1: Our submission is necessary because of God’s wrath and one’s conscience: therefore, you must be subject, not only because of wrath (13:5).

“Therefore,” or for this reason⁹³ that rulers do not bear the sword in vain. They are effective at administering judgment, thus “you must” be subject, denoting a necessity brought about by the nature of the way things are. The divine design that puts a sword in the hands of rulers brings a necessary pressure upon citizens to be subject to their leaders.

“Be subject” (as in 13:1) meaning to arrange ourselves under existing authorities, rather than exalting our preferences above their leadership. Why? Two reasons: first, *not only because of wrath*, which links back to 13:4.⁹⁴ That is, we should submit because rulers carry out God’s wrath upon the criminal elements of society. Judicial punishment, in part, is how God reveals His wrath from heaven: *for the wrath of God keeps on being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). Rulers should impartially execute the wrath of justice on criminals, even on Christians guilty of unlawful activity. Because rulers should execute impartial justice against evildoers, Paul urges believers to subject themselves to their rulers, lest they receive the brunt of civil wrath.

But to escape wrath is not the only reason to subject ourselves to human government for he says, *but also for conscience’ sake*. When Paul appeals to our conscience, he introduces another incentive for submission. The fear of punishment may not deter a person from criminal activity. Yet, a Christian has a higher reason for obedience. By appealing to our conscience, he “links man’s reaction to civil rulers with the divine origin of civil authority itself.”⁹⁵ A Christian should obey civil authority not so much because he fears punishment, but because He loves the Lord and wants to conform to His plan for society.

⁸⁸ Locke, *Original Extent*, 35:25.

⁸⁹ Logos Jerome.

⁹⁰ Logos Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a Presbyterian minister in Chester, England. His and Locke’s lives overlapped 54 years.

⁹¹ Cf. Dunn 2:764.

⁹² Bruce, 238.

⁹³ BDAG.

⁹⁴ The article of previous reference.

⁹⁵ Jerome.

And let's not lose sight that subjection is not because government is perfect, always impartially fair, or consistently wise in policy making. Our civil obedience is because we know something: We know that God Himself ordained government, so that whatever authority exists does so because God put it there whether directly or permissively. "[Our] knowledge is the knowledge that the ruler is, whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, God's minister."⁹⁶ Another commentator puts matters this way: "The thought is that the morally responsible person and good citizen will recognize the need for government in society as a divine ordinance (so most): resistance to this divinely ordered authority will provoke in such a person a pang of conscience ... and prospect of such moral discomfort should dissuade from civil disobedience."⁹⁷

Paul's point is that since we understand God's design for human government, it is necessary to obey otherwise our conscience will badger us with guilt feelings. No believer with qualms of conscience will enjoy "abundant life," i.e., have a satisfying life, good relationships with others, and more importantly honor the Lord.

Application #2 is that proper submission includes paying taxes and showing respect (13:6-7)—for because of this you also pay taxes! The original is better expressed by translating "Let me explain that because of this," that is, because rulers are God's servants and execute wrath on society's outlaws, we should pay our taxes to avoid divine/civil wrath and to preserve a good conscience.⁹⁸ The verse implies two broad civil functions:

- In order to protect citizens from the criminal element within its borders, rulers must raise funds to train and sustain a police force, judiciary, and means of punishment.
- To protect citizens from international outlaws and threats to the nation's well being, those in authority must raise additional funds to maintain a military force that acts as a deterrent, or that can defeat threats against its security.

Accordingly, when we pay our taxes, we tangibly show our subjection to the existing authorities and protect ourselves against criminals both internally and externally. We also remove a potential cause of guilt feelings.⁹⁹ But are only unbelievers to pay taxes? Should Christians assume that they are above taxation? The apostle continues saying, "You also," i.e., you Christians who benefit from the state's protection "pay taxes." We do not find this notion frequently in the Bible, but often enough to make the point:

- Jesus, though without inherent obligation to pay the temple tax, paid it anyway lest He offend the governing authorities (Matthew 17:24-27).
- Jesus also said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's (Matthew 22:21).

Thus, Romans 13:6 reminds us that we too pay taxes, whether we want to or not. The term for taxes (φόρος) is interesting; in 1 Maccabees 8:4 & 7 it describes the tribute paid to Rome by conquered countries such as Spain, or Galatia. Israel also paid such tribute to Rome.

And that by their policy and patience [the Roman army] had conquered all the place, though it were very far from them; and the kings also that came against them from the uttermost part of the earth, till they had [frustrated] them, and given them a great overthrow, so that the rest did give them tribute every year: Beside this ... also Antiochus the great king of Asia ... was [frustrated] by them; And they took him alive, and covenanted that he ... should pay a great tribute.¹⁰⁰

Now though we are not subject to another nation or empire—in spite of some politicians' efforts to surrender our sovereignty to the UN—in light of 13:1-7, we are to pay our taxes, thus fulfilling this responsibility to our rulers. Why? So that they may fulfill their responsibility to punish evildoers and to commend good conduct. Paul does not suggest that rulers will spend all our tax dollars wisely, or that Christians will approve of each cause for which it is spent. Whether we live in the first or 21st century, we are to pay anyway. By the way, we do not give our taxes as a gift, or a favor to the governing authorities. We pay taxes as a divinely delegated obligation from which a just government supplies us with:

Crime control,
National defense,
Fire protection,
Public highways,

Medic and ambulance service,
Water, electrical, and sewer services,
Street lights at intersections,
etc.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Cranfield 2:668.

⁹⁷ Dunn 2:765.

⁹⁸ "The Christians of Rome do, as a matter of fact, pay taxes ... and the real ground of their doing so is their knowledge of the place of civil authority in the divine purpose" (Cranfield 2:668).

⁹⁹ "This subjection is likewise consented to by the tribute we pay (v. 6): *For this cause pay you tribute*, as a testimony of your submission, and an acknowledgment that in conscience you think it to be due" (Logos Matthew Henry).

¹⁰⁰ *The King James Version Apocrypha* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

¹⁰¹ Logos Matthew Henry.

In the divine scheme, civil authorities are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. "God's ministers"¹⁰² is a different and nobler term for national leadership. In vs. 13:4, the term "God's servants/ministers"¹⁰³ (δῆκονός) signifies the actual service rulers render to their citizens. A different word for "ministers" (λειτουργός) in 13:6 signifies that they specifically have a role under God, fulfilling public leadership in His plan. And what are these public servants doing?—*attending continually to this very thing*, meaning they give close attention to collecting taxes from all of us. We knew *that* already; but what we may not have known is that taxation has the divine stamp of approval. Stop paying taxes and you will find out about this "close attention" sooner than you want! This is not to say that God thinks every tax levied by government is righteous, but it does say that heaven's approval is on the principle of taxation. "This very thing" speaks of the never-ending innovation of new taxes and their collection. I suspect that we discover man's greatest ingenuity in two ways: (1) How to create new taxes, and (2) how to avoid taxes.

Taxes have their place—an important place—but that is not all we owe governing authorities. Thus the apostle continues in 13:7 saying render therefore to all their due. "Therefore,"¹⁰⁴ or because taxation is built into the very fabric of God's design for human government, "render" or pay¹⁰⁵ your taxes. The implication of the verb "render," pay, or give back, "is that in a context of government, whether by right of conquest or not, taxation is an inescapable obligation on the members of the community so governed."¹⁰⁶ And, an obligation it is, as the term "due" connotes,¹⁰⁷ speaking of obligation, or duty, to pay all taxes, as well as three other matters that follow.

We have divinely imposed obligations to our civil powers—levied through God's servants, the governing authorities—though it is true that some things we do not owe them. Jesus said that whatever is due to Caesar we are to pay; and whatever is due to the Lord we are to render to the Lord, not to Caesar. Chief Justice William Howard Taft said that it is the duty of every citizen to avoid payment of all taxes and to evade payment of none. That is good common and legal sense, meaning to avoid all unnecessary taxes by declaring every lawful deduction, but not to evade any tax that is legally due. Another writer put matters this way:

Robert F. Sharpe has compared tax evasion and avoidance to a man wanting to cross a river but not wanting to pay to use the toll bridge. He could try to sneak past the tollgate, but that would be evasion and would be wrong. Or he could go out of his way and use the free bridge a few miles upstream, or swim or row across. That's avoidance, and there's nothing wrong with that.

In short, you may save taxes in every legal way you can, but you must pay that which you legally owe. It is your civic and Christian duty.¹⁰⁸

Paul categorizes due taxes of his era saying, to begin, to pay taxes to whom taxes are due. This term conveys the idea of direct taxes that are tantamount to federal and state taxation, the funds used for example to create and maintain a federal judiciary, military, CIA, FBI, police and fire protection. Next he says to pay customs to whom customs are due, signifying the indirect taxes or duties¹⁰⁹ Rome collected "from rents on state property ... [and] also customs duty, tax on slave sales and manumissions, death duties."¹¹⁰ Customs are tantamount to toll taxes, sales taxes, and one may expand the concept by way of application to include civil service such as jury duty.

The apostle continues saying to render fear¹¹¹ to whom fear is due. "Fear" is an active notion that speaks of giving reverence, or respect either:

- To God (cf. Romans 3:18),
- To civil authorities (Romans 13:7a, b);
- To one's master or employer (1 Peter 2:18; Ephesians 6:5);
- To one's husband (1 Peter 3:2).¹¹²

For our immediate purposes, to fear is to respect those in public office, such as the judge on the bench, the policeman walking his beat, or our men in uniform. Finally, believers ought to render honor to whom honor is due, which is to value them. Romans 12:10 urges us to "honor" fellow believers. Here the apostle enlarges the challenge to include those in public office. We should value them and the services they provide. Without them—including even the unprincipled ones—society and civilization would collapse into chaos and anarchy.

¹⁰² The clause is λειτουργοὶ ... θεοῦ.

¹⁰³ Twice this clause occurs in vs. 4, θεοῦ ... δῆκονός.

¹⁰⁴ The conjunction οὖν is in M, but not NA²⁷.

¹⁰⁵ BDAG.

¹⁰⁶ Dunn 2:766.

¹⁰⁷ BDAG.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted by Eidsmoe, 38.

¹⁰⁹ BDAG.

¹¹⁰ Dunn 2:766.

¹¹¹ Cranfield (2:669-673) argues that "fear" is toward God and "honor" is toward earthly rulers.

¹¹² BDAG.

To sum up

- ✓ Though the Roman government through Pontius Pilate granted permission to crucify Jesus Christ, yet the apostle says to be subject to the governing authorities, even though it was the supreme example of a miscarriage of justice!
- ✓ Though Paul and his missionary teams endured unjust and harsh treatment from some civil authorities, he commands us to be subject to authority—even as he was subject to civil authority, e.g.,:
 - In Philippi (Acts 16:20-24, 37);
 - In Corinth (Acts 18:12-17);
 - In general (2 Cor. 11:25-26).
- ✓ The upshot is God's will is that we arrange ourselves under existing authority. Why?—because God established it for as long as it exists. Accordingly, to fulfill Jesus' teaching to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, we must:

Pay all required taxes.
 Render Jury duty when called upon.
 Vote as able.
 Military service, if your country calls.

Civil service, if God leads you that way as He did Joseph, Daniel, Mordecai, and Nehemiah.
 Obedience to the laws of the land.
 Pray for existing authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

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.

ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον, εἴτε βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, εἴτε ἡγεμόσιν ὡς δι' αὐτοῦ πεμπόμενοι εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν ὅτι οὕτως ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγαθοποιούντας φιμοῦν τὴν τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνωσίαν, ὡς ἐλεύθεροι καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐπικάλυμμα ἔχοντες τῆς κακίας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀλλ' ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι. πάντας τιμῆσατε, τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπάτε, τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε, τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε.

People say that bad government is a terrible thing, and it is. Nevertheless, bad government is better than no government, which, as the book of Judges well illustrates, when there is no governing authority it opens wide the door to moral confusion, anarchy, lawlessness, and civil degeneration.

Participating in a society with a functioning government is the act of surrendering total personal freedom for the protections and benefits of that government-managed society. Whether that's a good idea or not depends completely on the balance between what benefits the government provides and how much the rights and especially the freedoms of citizens and others are infringed upon.¹¹³

Roots of Submission	
ὑπο	τάσσω
<i>hupo</i>	<i>tassō</i>
Under	To arrange

Peter writes to Christians who live under imperfect government.

Of course, the only time that will not be true in planet earth's history will be during the revived Davidic Kingdom (Millennium) when Jesus Christ rules with a "rod of iron"—with perfect justice, mercy, and impartiality.

In the meantime, all believers live under various governmental systems that are invented and ruled by men. All human rulers fall short of perfection. To varying degrees, lust for power, material advantage, and approbation drive them. Moreover, the devil urges rulers to rebel against God's norms resulting in a world-system that hates Christians as it hates their Lord. Yet God calls believers to be a light¹¹⁴ in this hostile environment.

*Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.*¹¹⁵

"A crooked¹¹⁶ and perverse¹¹⁷ generation"—the divine point of view of civil authorities and populace—do not have the best interests of Christians in view. Yet, even when its antagonism is severe, our calling is to be Christ's am-

¹¹³ Downloaded from the internet on 3-3-12, <http://bigtalk.info/?q=node/13>. See Appendix A for an unabridged printout of the essay from which this quotation comes.

¹¹⁴ Besides "light," Jesus adds "salt" (Matthew 5:13; cf. Colossians 4:6).

¹¹⁵ Philippians 2:14-16a.

¹¹⁶ BDAG: "σκολιός ... pert. to being bent, curved, or crooked as opposed to straight, crooked (opp. εὐθύς ...) ... pert. to being morally bent or twisted, crooked, unscrupulous, dishonest."

bassadors by conduct and oral witness. Peter develops the divine viewpoint with a command: *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man* (2:13).

“Therefore”¹¹⁸ links back to 2:12 where the apostle urges us to honorable conduct that in the day of visitation—whatever day God intervenes in the life of an unbeliever—he may glorify God. Even though unbelievers bad mouth believers, our conduct should be visibly honorable. When the apostle urges honorable conduct, what does he have in mind?—in part, submission to civil authority.

The idea is to subordinate oneself voluntarily under the rule of governing authorities.¹¹⁹ Indeed, we should arrange ourselves under “every ordinance of man.” An “ordinance” denotes the result of an act by which an authoritative or governmental body is created—the institution or authority itself.¹²⁰ Thus, the governing authority is not conceived in heaven, but on earth: it is an ordinance “of man,” brought into existence by flawed humans. The invisible reality above the establishment of authoritative institutions is God who raises up those who rule (Romans 13:1-7).

In the ‘government–citizens category,’ a Christian citizen submits for the Lord’s sake, that is, “because of”¹²¹ the Lord’s sake,” or to promote His will for our lives and His glory. Historically “the king” is the Roman Caesar. The principle is for a believer to arrange himself under his country’s highest authority, whether the people label him Prime Minister, King, President, or whatever. Obeying supreme authority in one’s country is not that difficult to understand. However, Peter does not stop there.

Submission extends to *governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good* (2:14). “Governors” denote imperial governors, or Procurators and Proprætors. The Roman Senate appointed Procurators over provinces considered peaceful. Caesar appointed Proprætors over provinces considered troublesome, such as Judea. Imperial appointees had a two-fold objective:

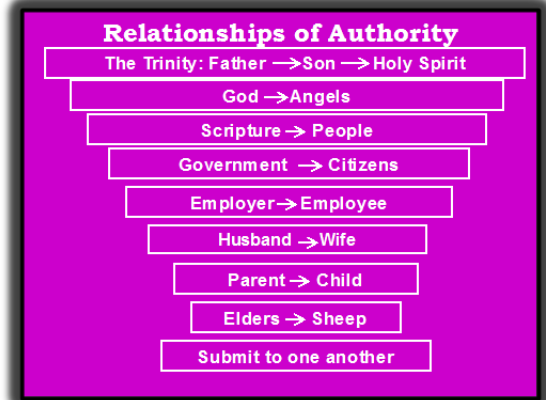


Figure 1: The above slide elucidates how authoritative relationships exist everywhere.

1. “Punishment of evildoers”—“Evildoers” are the criminal element of society, such as organized crime (Mafia), or outlaws like gang-bangers, Billy the kid, John Dillinger, and so forth—those who operate outside the law of the land. The criminal element is to be punished: “Punishment” is the same term we find elsewhere translated “vengeance”: *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord* (Romans 12:19; so also Hebrews 10:30).

Peter adds that God delegates the punishment of, or vengeance against, evildoers to institutions of law-enforcement created by man. The biblically uninformed may think that government is itself evil. Not so! God originally ordained this divine institution in Genesis 9. The people who serve in government may be evil, but God ordained the principle of government as an earthly institution, to be brought into practical existence by man.

The authority of government extends to the taking of a criminal’s life via capital punishment. For example, Pilate told Jesus that he had the power of life and death over the Lord, and Jesus did not challenge that. Jesus clarified that Pilate’s authority was ultimately from God. The authority God gives governmental leaders is, in part, to punish evildoers, thus suppressing various expressions of evil or crime. Though the state often becomes its own form of organized greed, deceit, and oppression, it is a far superior alternative to anarchy and chaos—something the French Revolution discovered the hard way.

2. “Praise of those who do good”—“Praise” speaks of a country’s positive recognition of meritorious service, e.g., in scientific research, educational advances, and military heroism. In our time, expressions of a state’s praise come in the form of Appointments to the Military Academies, a Rhodes Scholarship, the Nobel Prize, Congressional Metal of Honor, a Presidential Citation, and so forth.

The notion of “ordinance of man” brings into the picture organization. We see that structure, order, and symmetry are good things. They enable a group to function at peak efficiency. Accordingly, 1 Corinthians 14:40 says to “do all things decently and in order.” Why?—so that the edification of believers may proceed on a fast track. 1 Peter

¹¹⁷ BDAG: “διαστρέφω ... to cause to be distorted, *deform* ... (... of objects that turn out as failures in the hands of a clumsy workman, and whose shape is therefore distorted) of a vessel on the potter’s wheel: *become misshapen* ... to cause to depart from an accepted standard of oral or spiritual values, *make crooked* ... *perverted* in the moral sense, *depraved* ... Mt 17:17; Lk 9:41; Phil 2:15 (Dt 32:5; cf. Pr 6:14 ...).

¹¹⁸ οὐν, which is not in NA²⁷.

¹¹⁹ BibleWorks.

¹²⁰ BDAG.

¹²¹ Greek is *dia* + accusative.

2:11-12 exhorts Christians to honorable conduct having an evangelistic goal in view. Do so, Peter urges, so that when the Lord visits unbelievers, they will glorify Him. If someone asks, when does the Lord visit them, the answer is in John 16:8-11. That is, He visits as the Holy Spirit intervenes in their lives to convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. How receptive they are—what kind of ground they are to receive the seed of the Word at the moment of visitation—in part depends on our honorable conduct that (a) manifests good works and (b) exhibits submission to governing authorities.

Peter teaches that one of the important good works we are to do is submit to various categories of authority. Let's not forget that submission is the norm; disobedience is the exception. We should not be guilty of making the exception the norm.

The command of 2:13 is clear, is it not? Submit yourselves to every institution of man for the Lord's sake. This is an important way for us to contribute to the structure and order of society, thus helping pave the way for the Holy Spirit's visitation to unbelievers. Honorable conduct that works side-by-side with the Holy Spirit's convicting work includes arranging ourselves under the leadership of civil authorities. In fact, it seems fitting to suggest that our honorable conduct by submission prepares the way for the Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction, as John the Baptist paved the way for the Lord's ministry. And Peter has more to add to his instruction.

Submission to governing authorities is doing good and has a positive by-product: *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men* (2:15-16). "For" (*hoti*) links to "submit yourselves" in 2:12, introducing a powerful reason for arranging ourselves under civil authority: *It is the will of God!* When Peter says "this" is God's will, "this" looks forward to vs. 2:15-17. Accordingly, the will of God is to subject ourselves to presidents and governors, that believers may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Why put them to silence?—because they speak against you as evildoers (2:12; cf. 3:16).

Because of loose tongues, "foolish men" are not silent. Their lips are full of accusations, insinuations, innuendo, and slander. They create a cloud of verbal insults that distracts from the gospel of God's grace. They need to be silenced, but not with a silencer attached to your Glock semi-automatic 9mm! The command is to arrange yourselves under civil authorities so that "you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Literally "put to silence" means to tie shut, or to muzzle an ox. For example, the expression describes Christ muzzling the mouths of the Sadducees with His superior grasp of Scripture (Matthew 22:34), then here of our good works that muzzle bad-mouthers.

How we muzzle those who verbally attack us is the focus of attention. So how?—by doing good works. The notion of "good works" carries on what Peter said at the end of 2:14. Accordingly, the passage does not emphasize what we accomplish, but how we accomplish it.¹²² In other words, "the ignorance of the foolish" will be silenced by the doing of good, which includes submission to civil authorities where they do not violate biblical commands or prohibitions.¹²³

We may have the best arguments, impressive church buildings, eloquent preachers, erudite teachers, and so on, but the significant part is "the doing of good." Let's reemphasize that doing good happens within a basic framework of authority and submission. The progression is first to set our houses in order, which involves arranging ourselves under man's institutional authority. Then get on with good works. Sometimes a problem emerges here, however, for there are do-gooders who are in rebellion against authority. This is not good, for willing submission comes first, then good works! Peter clearly says such conduct is *the will of God*—a fascinating phrase that occurs several times. Here are a few:

- Mark 3:31-35—*Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."*

"Whoever does the will of God" includes the one who stops kicking against the goads of political power and submits to civil authority. This one is the Lord's brother, sister, or mother.

- Romans 12:2—*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

By a study Scripture, we learn the content of God's will. As we arrange ourselves under the governing authorities, we prove to ourselves that it is good and acceptable to God.

- Galatians 1:4—*Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

In part, Christ delivered us from the insubordination that resides in the sin nature. By His grace we may submit to the authorities, doing good works that will matter in the day the Lord visits the unbeliever.

¹²² WBC.

¹²³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, electronic ed., Logos edition (Dallas: Word, 1998).

- Ephesians 6:6—*Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*
The will of God is not to fake what we do for the Lord abhors pretenders. We are to do the will of God from the heart, which in our current study is to arrange ourselves under legitimate authority.
- Hebrews 10:36—*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.*
God has not promised us a rose garden in this life. We need endurance to do the will of God because doing it may bring temporal affliction rather than material blessing. Arranging ourselves under a government like Nero's—which Peter's readers were under—may have an unpleasant side. Like persecution, or being told to deny Christ, or die!

Other passages talk about the will of God, but these suffice for now. Peter's point, again, is "that [Christians] by doing good" make progress toward silencing their critics,¹²⁴ presupposing of course that we walk by means of the Spirit. These good works may become a basis for the state's praise (2:14), and they prepare bad-mouthers for the day of visitation.

Peter has an interesting description of those who speak evil of Christians. What comes out of their mouths he calls the ignorance of foolish men. Being ignorant, bad-mouthers have no basis in fact for accusing believers of being evildoers. Earlier Peter reminded his readers that before they became Christians—in their times of ignorance—their habit of life was to conform to their lusts (1:14), which is what bad-mouthers now do. There is no wrongdoing attached to ignorance of the truth for it is no sin to be ignorant before the Holy Spirit illuminates one's mind to the gospel. Nor can we fault a believer for ignorance, when he has not yet heard sound Bible teaching. To the contrary, we should have compassion and encourage them to sit under Bible teaching.

Those who have bad-mouthed Christians over the centuries, however, are blameworthy because "on subjects of which one is ignorant one ought not to"¹²⁵ disparage. Accordingly, the Bible further identifies these critics as "foolish men," demonstrating they speak against what they do not understand—that makes them "fools."¹²⁶ They are "foolish" because they interpret what in fact are good works to be evil and air their erroneous opinion (2:12). In the first three centuries, they slandered Christians as traitors because they would not call Caesar *ku-rios*, Lord. But, Christians were the most obedient citizens in the Empire so long as Caesar did not demand an obedience that disobeyed God. Many Romans accused Christians of hating society because they refused to attend the bloodthirsty killings in the Coliseums, though that was good application of doctrine. Nevertheless, Peter later says that those who defame believers as evildoers also "revile [their] good conduct in Christ."¹²⁷

Verse 2:16 continues clarification of God's will to submit to civil authority: *As*¹²⁸ *free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice.* "As free" speaks of the freedom that we have in Christ. "As" should not be understood in the sense :as though," pretending to be free when in fact we are not. The reality is that we are free. Paul taught that we must *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage* (Galatians 5:1).

Peter cannot mean political or social freedom because many of his readers were slaves (2:18-20). Even the freedom of Christian wives is circumscribed by their husbands (3:1-6). The freedom Peter has in mind is a freedom that all Christians have regardless of their social, civil, or marital status:

- Freedom from a lifeless hope regarding eternity (1:3-4).
- Freedom from the ignorance that keeps one enslaved to his lusts (1:14).
- Freedom from loveless, exploitive relationships through the new birth (1:22-23; cf. 2:10, once were not a people but are now the people of God).
- Freedom from an aimless existence, because the Lord chose us to be a holy and royal priesthood to serve Him (cf. 1:18 with 2:9), which is deliverance from the "darkness of paganism."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Regarding silencing critics by one's works, Romans 1:20 reveals that God's works in creation render man "without excuse;" so, all unbelievers will stand with their hands over their mouths at the final judgment. In addition, Romans 3:19 reveals that by the law "every mouth may be stopped." Both by God's works in creation and by the giving of the law, He has sufficiently revealed Himself so that no one can successfully defend himself—he will be silenced—for rejecting Christ.

¹²⁵ WBC.

¹²⁶ WBC: They were [and are] by no means slow to speak, and to speak evil at that.

¹²⁷ 1 Peter 3:16.

¹²⁸ WBC: "the contrasting phrases with *ως* are more than similes, more even than metaphors; they express for Peter an 'actual quality' (BGD, 898.2. la) of those redeemed in Christ—a spiritual and psychological state of freedom from the old 'natural impulses' (cf. 2:11), and a firm commitment of mind and heart to God."

¹²⁹ WBC.

The exhortation “Yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice” is rarely overdone! People delivered from the tyranny of religion, paganism, and enslavement to lust, may abuse their freedom, and become slaves all over again, this time to the flesh. So, Galatians issues the same kind of caution: *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another* (Galatians 5:13).

The fact is that Christ redeemed us at great cost, granting us a magnificent freedom. Yet, our liberation is not a reason to strike back at those who attack us verbally. Nor is our emancipation a freedom from various relationships of authority in this life, such as to government, to employers, to husbands, to the biblical injunction to husbands, and to the elders of one’s local church. We are free in Christ, yet in all our relationships we have no warrant from the Lord to abuse our freedom.

- No provocation justifies taking vengeance into our own hands.
- No cursing lips excuse returning evil for evil.
- No insensitive, hardhearted treatment permits using our liberty to retaliate.
- No hardnosed agent of the IRS is reason for defiance of the governing authorities.

That kind of conduct does not encourage unbelievers to glorify God in the day of their visitation—that day in this life when the Holy Spirit intervenes to convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And yet, some believers use their freedom as a cloak for vice. That is a to-the-point reminder that our freedom is qualified—it is a freedom that carries responsibility.

What does the “cloak” speak of? It speaks of freedom that one uses as an excuse for vice or evil (κακία).¹³⁰ In 2:1 the apostle urged his readers to lay aside all malice (κακία), such as using freedom as a cloak to dodge submission to authority, even to *every created institution of man* (2:13). The prohibition not to hide behind a “cloak” clearly applies to organizations that use Christianity as a front for criminal activities, such as assassinating abortion doctors, or blowing up abortion mills. As evil and hateful as those groups are in the eyes of God, the will of God does not permit believers to use their liberty to take vengeance into their own hands.

Knowing that there will always be politicians who are unprincipled, even anti-Christian pagans, an exegetical commentator says:

Peter wants his readers to make absolutely certain that no charges of misconduct leveled against them are ever actually true. When freedom becomes the believer’s watchword there is as much danger of antinomianism in relation to the laws of the state or the customs of ... society as there is in relation to the laws of God. ... Peter fears rather the possible assumption by some of his readers that because they are free from the ignorance and darkness of their pagan past, they are free also of their legitimate obligations to the pagan empire and household. Such an attitude would be disastrous because it would bring needless suffering on the Christian community, and yet ironically it would be suffering richly deserved (cf. 2:20; 4:15).¹³¹

The corrective to abusing liberty, perverting it into an opportunity for vice, is to recall we are servants of God. An implication is that if we abuse our liberty, we are not the servants of Christ. We cannot have it both ways. Either we abuse liberty serving our lusts, or we serve Christ. However, there is a positive lesson here. The phrase “servants of God” is parallel to “as free”—they effectively modify one another. Accordingly, we are in fact free, but free to serve the one who freed us. Furthermore, being free leads naturally into verse 17 and four ways in which our servanthood should find expression.

Now follows four applications of submission to civil authorities (1 Peter 2:17).

(#1 of 4) *Honor all people*. To honor means to render due respect for all people at all levels of government. Of course, in our country “we the people”—at the voting booth—are the government, thus we honor all fellow-citizens. It is fair to say, however, that what Peter has most in mind is to honor, or to value, the contributions that those in all levels of government make to society. Are they perfect? No! Do they make mistakes? Yes! Are they sometimes (too often!) guilty of abuse in their office? Of course. Is such failure justifiable? No!

The Holy Spirit says to value their contributions anyway. Why?—even an elementary study of history teaches us that without civil authorities society would degenerate into anarchy and chaos, resulting in crime and corruption becoming a 100 times worse than it is.¹³² For the law of the jungle would overtake the country. There-

¹³⁰ WBC.

¹³¹ WBC.

¹³² A classic historical example is the French Revolution. Wikipedia summaries as follows: “The Reign of Terror (5 September 1793 to 28 July 1794) ... was a period of violence that occurred after the onset of the [French Revolution](#), incited by conflict between rival political factions, the [Girondins](#) and the [Jacobins](#), and marked by mass executions of ‘enemies of the revolution.’ The death toll ranged in the tens of thousands, with 16,594 executed by [guillotine](#) (2,639 in Paris), and another 25,000 in [summary executions](#) across France.

fore, as voluntary servants of God, our first application of submission is to value all those in places of civil authority.

(#2 of 4) *Love the brotherhood*. In 5:9, the “brotherhood” is “in the world,” suffering the same sufferings as Peter’s readers. Who is the “brotherhood,” we answer by beginning with the question “How does one join the brotherhood?” The Bible calls the “brotherhood” elsewhere “the children of God”¹³³ or “sons of God”¹³⁴—a family entered by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Such faith triggers the new birth, for the incorruptible seed of God’s word brings about regeneration when one believes (cf. 1 Peter 1:3 with vs. 23). The upshot is that Peter challenges his readers—and you and me—to honor all those who are the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because loving the brotherhood links to vs. 12, “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles,” to live an honorable life, we must love each other whether a babe in Christ, adolescent, or mature—and, yes, even carnal. Sometimes a test of the measure of our love and integrity is how we love believers who are unlovable being shifty, obnoxious, and full of selfish ambition. Regardless, love the brotherhood, or as Peter put it in 1:22, *love one another fervently with a pure heart*, which is better done in fellowship with them, not from a distance. That is a tall order, but not an impossible order because our sufficiency is not from within ourselves but from the Lord.

(#3 of 4) *Fear God*, which is to hold Him in high regard in keeping with His positions as redeemer, sustainer, deliverer, and judge. We may call it a sense of awe, authentically developed by the Spirit of God working through the implanted word of God, knowing that the One able to create the galaxies, and who has the power to cast into hell, and to be a consuming fire in His discipline of His people, has His eye on us (cf. Hebrews .

(#4 of 4) *Honor the king*. Jesus taught that we are to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.¹³⁵ Paul teaches that we are to render taxes, customs, respect, and honor to ruling authorities.¹³⁶ The book of Proverbs says: *My son, fear/respect the Lord and the king*.¹³⁷ The opposite of “honor” is negative indeed so we learn that despising authority is a symptom of apostasy.¹³⁸ Moreover, rejecting God’s established authority is tantamount to witchcraft.¹³⁹ Accordingly, Peter exhorts us to *honor the king*. How?—in context by doing good, even when they speak against you as evildoers.

“The guillotine (called the ‘National Razor’) became the symbol of the revolutionary cause, strengthened by a string of executions: Marie Antoinette, King Louis XVI, the Girondins, Philippe Égalité (Louis Philippe II, Duke of Orléans) and Madame Roland, as well as many others, such as pioneering chemist Antoine Lavoisier, lost their lives under its blade. During 1794, revolutionary France was beset with conspiracies by internal and foreign enemies. Within France, the revolution was opposed by the French nobility, which had lost its inherited privileges. The Roman Catholic Church was generally against the Revolution, which had turned the clergy into employees of the state and required they take an oath of loyalty to the nation (through the Civil Constitution of the Clergy). In addition, the First French Republic was engaged in a series of wars with neighboring powers intent on crushing the revolution to prevent its spread.

“The extension of civil war and the advance of foreign armies on national territory produced a political crisis and increased the rivalry between the Girondins and the more radical Jacobins. The latter were eventually grouped in the parliamentary faction called the Mountain, and they had the support of the Parisian population. The French government established the Committee of Public Safety, which took its final form on 6 September 1793 in order to suppress internal counter-revolutionary activities and raise additional French military forces. Through the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Terror’s leaders exercised broad dictatorial powers and used them to instigate mass executions and political purges. The repression accelerated in June and July 1794, a period called “la Grande Terreur” (the Great Terror), and ended in the coup of ... (27 July 1794), leading to the Thermidorian Reaction, in which several protagonists of the Reign of Terror were executed, including Saint-Just and Robespierre.”

¹³³ John 1:12-13.

¹³⁴ Galatians 3:26.

¹³⁵ Luke 20:25.

¹³⁶ Romans 13:7.

¹³⁷ Proverbs 24:21.

¹³⁸ Jude 8-10.

¹³⁹ 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Titus 2:11-3:2

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.¹⁵ Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.^{3:1} Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις,¹² παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς ἵνα ἀρνησάμενοι τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι,¹³ προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,¹⁴ ὃς ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα λυτρώσῃται ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνομίας καὶ καθάρισῃ ἑαυτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον, ζηλωτὴν καλῶν ἔργων.¹⁵ Ταῦτα λάλει καὶ παρακάλει καὶ ἔλεγχε μετὰ πάσης ἐπιταγῆς. Μηδεὶς σου περιφρονεῖτω.^{3:1} Ὑπομίμησκε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι, πειθαρχεῖν, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐτοίμους εἶναι,² μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπιεικεῖς, πάσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραότητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους.

Brief comments should suffice. The milieu in which these instructions occur is an Empire with “rulers and authorities.” Citizens are to “obey” them. Each generation of Christians, regardless of the kind of government under which they live, are taught by the “grace of God” (a) to be “godly in the present age,” and (b) “to be zealous for good works ... to be ready for every good work.” Obeying civil authority is one of those good works. Titus later drives home what our principle responsibility is both as citizens of a country and as fellow-believers in the body of Christ:

- ✓ *This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. (Titus 3:8)*
- ✓ *And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)*

For our purposes, the imperative is to obey civil authority, which is the rule without mentioning exceptions. All the while, good works should permeate our lifestyles.

Paul’s Use of Civil Authority

By no stretch of imagination, can one say that the Roman governmental system was at all points just and merciful, though compared to many ancient governments it was good. The best of the Caesars had feet of clay, so that inordinate ambition, partiality, cruelty, and injustice ran rampant. Yet, we do not find a jot or tittle of revelation promoting, or even hinting, the overthrow of existing Roman authority. To the contrary, so far as it was possible and expedient, the apostle took advantage of his Roman citizenship to fulfill his divine calling and ambition to advance the cause of Christ.

To Safeguard Credibility before Unbelievers

They [the ‘magistrates’ of vs. 16:35] have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out. (Acts 16:37)

Being an “uncondemned Roman” indicates that his rights as a Roman citizen had been trampled on when they beat and imprisoned him without a fair trial. Such treatment, in the eyes of the citizens of Philippi, cast aspersion on Paul and thus on his message. So far as he is able, he will not permit such unacceptable bad press to exist lest it undermine his ministry. Thus, he demands a public release and apology showing the Philippians that what he preached is on the up-and-up.

Paul is not self-serving with his demand. He has in view the new converts of Philippi and their on-going testimony to unbelieving friends, relatives, and future converts. If he and his missionary team leave town under a cloud of disgrace, it will make the future ministry of the church more difficult because the citizens of Philippi would view them with suspicion.

To Enhance One’s Personal Status for Ministry

Paul said, I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. (Acts 21:39)

Again, Paul makes an issue of his citizenship. He says what he does to impress upon the tribune who has apprehended him that he is not *persona non grata*—a nobody whom they can dismiss with a wave of the hand. To the contrary, his Roman citizenship gives him status and on that basis, he appeals to speak before a large and unruly crowd to whom he then gives the gospel. It is important to notice *why* he uses his citizenship. Not to re-

store his rights; not to challenge unjust detention or merely to save himself. And, not to rebuke the Jewish mob for their false accusations and knee-jerk reaction to his being in the temple. He claims his citizenship so he can execute his ambassadorship for Christ and testify of conversion with its forgiveness by calling on the name of the Lord.

To Protect Oneself from Unnecessary Bodily Harm

As they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned? (Acts 22:27)

This is self-serving, though in a legitimate way for Jesus said to be harmless as doves yet shrewd as serpents. By revealing his Roman citizenship, he impresses on the centurion that he is authentic, not a wild-eyed Jew promoting civil unrest. He is a citizen to be reckoned with on equal terms before a Roman tribunal. Paul's revelation of Roman citizenship delivers him from a life-threatening scourging and leaves him sound in body to continue his ministry before (a) the Roman military (Acts 22:24-29), (b) the Jewish religious leaders (22:30-23:11), and (c) Felix the governor (23:23-24:27). His use of Roman citizenship, again, though initially self-serving, ultimately has as its objective continuance in the work of the ministry.

To Protect Oneself from Unlawful Death

If I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar. (Acts 25:11)

Paul's appeal to Caesar is a successful attempt to by-pass corruption, injustice, and even execution in the lower courts of Palestine. If he is incarcerated in a Judean prison, or at Machaerus (where John the Baptist lost his head), his life expectancy is short indeed. If dead, his opportunity to resume ministry is over. Therefore, he appeals to Caesar and will continue his ministry both in and out of future imprisonments. His use of an appeal, a citizen's right, is ministry oriented, not intended to change the political or judicial environment existing in the first century AD.

To sum up: These passages signify that it is within the will of God to claim our rights as citizens. The existence of the 10 Commandments signifies that we have rights, e.g., the right to life (Deuteronomy 5:17), the right to sexual integrity in marriage (5:18), the right to property (5:19), and the right to a good reputation (5:20). God ordained human government to protect these God-given rights, shielding us against criminal activity that would take them from us. Thus, citizens may seek that protection, including Christian citizens, appealing to the legal system and praying for justice, which may or may not be forthcoming. There is nothing spiritual about unnecessarily enduring affliction at the hands of evil authorities. Accordingly, if an appeal to the law, and the rights protected by the law, can be made, make it!

Before one appeals to the legal system to redress a wrong suffered, he should first follow the Lord's instruction in Matthew 5:25-26.

Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Here is an important and practical matter to consider, and apply! Each time Paul used his rights of citizenship, he did it for the furtherance of the gospel. He did not exercise his rights simply for self-serving ends, such as to evade civic responsibilities, avoid due taxes, or to shirk serving his country in wartime. Paul's overriding motivation was that he is a citizen of heaven and that informs how he uses his earthly citizenship. How he exercises his rights depends on whether it helps further the kingdom of God. If exercising a right helps, then exercise it he does. If a right could be exercised, but has no discernible contribution for the kingdom of God, then he lets it go. The possession of rights does not demand insisting on one's rights.

When a Christian disobeys civil authority based on scripture, his concern is to do the right as God gives him to see the right. He obeys God rather than man, leaving outcomes in the Lord's hands. Whether deliverance or death is to be his lot, he does what he is persuaded is the right thing to do.

Bottom Line

When a Christian disobeys on the basis of Scripture, his concern is to do the right as God gives him to see the right. He obeys God rather than man, leaving results in the Lord's hands.

Whether deliverance or death is to be his lot, he does what he is persuaded is the right thing to do.

Accepting Consequences

But some may ask: "What if the magistrate should enjoin anything by his authority that appears unlawful to the conscience of a private person?" I answer that, if government be faithfully administered and the counsels of the magistrates be indeed directed to the public good, this will seldom happen. But if, perhaps, it do so fall out, I say, that such a private person is to abstain from the action that he judges unlawful and he is to undergo the punishment which it is not unlawful for him to bear. For the private judgement of any person concerning a law enacted in political matters, for the public good does not take away the obligation of that law, nor deserve a dispensation.¹⁴⁰

When evil civil law compels Christians to disobey authority, we accept the consequences. Sometimes God delivers His people (Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego and Daniel). Sometimes He does not, for example, (a) Jesus, and (b) many Old Testament heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:35-37). (c) We observe non-deliverance also in 2nd and 3rd Century believers thrown to the lions, and (d) modern day believers being tortured and martyred by Muslims in Indonesia and North Africa. Choosing to disobey governmental authority should never be apart from willingness to put one's life on the line. Locke said the following (take a big breath, it is one long sentence):

[I]f all the world shall observe pretences of one kind, and actions of another, arts used to elude the law, and the trust of prerogative (which is an arbitrary power in some things left in the prince's hand to do good, not harm to the people) employed contrary to the end for which it was given; if the people shall find the ministers and subordinate magistrates chosen suitable to such ends, and favoured or laid by proportionably as they promote or oppose them; if they see several experiments made of arbitrary power and that religion underhand favoured, though publicly proclaimed against, which is readiest to introduce it, and the operations in it supported as much as may be; and when that cannot be done, yet approved still, and liked the better and a long train of acting show the counsels all tending that way, now can a man any more hinder himself from being persuaded in his own mind which way things are going; or, from casting about how to save himself, than he could from believing the captain of a ship he was in was carrying him and the rest of the company to Algiers, when he found him always steering that course, though cross winds, leaks in his ship, and want of men and provisions did often force him to turn his course another way for some time, which he steadily returned to again as soon as the wind, weather, and other circumstances would let him?¹⁴¹

Let's be clear about something. The Bible does not condone disobedience to the state merely because it passes legislation at cross-purposes to our preferences, or even because it violates our "rights." First Proof: In the historical context of first century Corinth, the Empire had legitimized the violation of the rights of ten of thousands of men and women. Rome made them slaves, trampling on their personal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet Paul instructs Christian slaves to maintain the status quo, unless an opportunity for freedom arose.¹⁴² He nowhere urges them to rebel to correct the monstrous evil of slavery. Second Proof: It is the right of employees and wives to be treated mercifully, impartially, and fairly, rather than with harshness and disrespect. Yet, the biblical imperative is for them to submit to bad employers and husbands, even when they are harsh; no green light is given to rebel because their rights are abused.¹⁴³ Their example for such submission is Jesus Christ whose rights were terribly abused by six illegal trials then crucifixion, yet He did not retaliate though He could have reduced His persecutors to molecules.¹⁴⁴

A number of times the New Testament gives examples of political corruption and oppression against Christians. Yet, believers did not resort to rebellion or civil disobedience.

- 1) Paul was stoned at Lystra, Timothy's hometown (Acts 14:8-20). He did not advocate insurgency, but got up, dusted himself off, and immediately went back to being an ambassador for Christ.
- 2) Civil authorities beat and imprisoned Paul unlawfully at Philippi (Acts 16:16-34; 1 Thess. 2:2). Upon release, he demanded a public apology by the authorities, but did not encourage overthrow of civil authority.
- 3) Contrary to civil law, Paul was unjustly slapped in court. He thus rebuked the High Priest not knowing who he was. When informed that he had rebuked the High Priest, who was also the judge in civil matters, Paul deferred to his authority though corrupt (Acts 22:30-23:5).
- 4) In Caesarea, the apostle spent two years in prison because Felix hoped Paul would slide a bribe under the table for his freedom (Acts 24:26-27). The apostle would not and eventually appealed to Caesar for a hoped-for fair trial in Rome. He did not advocate overthrow of corrupt government officials in Caesarea.
- 5) In 2 Corinthians 11:24-26, Paul relates how he often felt the unjust whip of tyranny, along with being *in prisons more frequently, in deaths often* (11:23). Yet, not once did he promote rebellion against the Roman government. So far as our sparse historical records disclose of the end of Paul's life, he, without a scintilla of discernible rebellion, laid his head on the chopping block to go be with the Lord. ISBE reports the following regarding the apostle to the Gentiles.

¹⁴⁰ Locke, *Toleration*, 35:16-17.

¹⁴¹ Locke, *Concerning*, 35:73.

¹⁴² 1 Corinthians 7:21.

¹⁴³ 1 Peter 2:18-20 and 3:1-6.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Peter 2:21-25.

In the NT Paul is probably the most renowned figure who experienced incarceration. As a servant of God, Paul endured, among other things, numerous imprisonments (2 Corinthians 6:4f; 11:23, 28). The book of Acts records at least three, while early tradition attests to as many as seven confinements (1 Clem. 5:6). In Philippi both Paul and Silas were imprisoned under the care of a jailer (Gk δεσμοφύλαξ Acts 16:23, 27, 36; cf. LXX Genesis 39:21 ... Ant. ii.5.1 [61]) who subsequently converted to the faith (Acts 16:30–34). To avoid a Jewish ambush, Paul was escorted by a Roman tribune to Caesarea, where he was confined while awaiting his appearance before Felix the procurator of Judea (23:12–35). But in order to win favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison (24:27). Later Paul's appeal to Caesar before Festus destined him for Rome (25:12). After arriving at Rome Paul was guarded by a soldier (28:16) and was bound by a light chain (v 20; cf. W. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (1920), cf. 349). He remained in this condition for two years, but enjoyed relative freedom (v 30). Paul's own prison experiences are ironic in view of his former activities as Saul, "persecutor of the church" (Philippians 3:6; cf. Acts 8:3; 21:1–21).¹⁴⁵

Without question, the scriptural standard is obedience! We must not lose sight of that fact when pursuing possible exceptions. Accordingly, when we are around a crowd that is angry, upset with a state's policies, supposing they know more than those in high places—and maybe they do—obedience remains God's will for believers. If a crowd becomes riotous, resorting to sedition, looting, burning, destroying property, Moses long ago spelled out the will of God: *You shall not follow a crowd to do evil* (Exodus 23:2).¹⁴⁶ NT examples of mob rule, or ochlocracy, are at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), Ephesus (Acts 19:29–40), and Jerusalem (Acts 21:28, 30). The principle is that we ought not pervert justice by deferring to majority opinion when we are persuaded that what is right lies elsewhere. "The former part of this verse [Exodus 23:2] also gives a general rule for all, as well as judges, not to follow a multitude to do evil. General usage will never excuse us in a bad practice; nor is the broad way ever the better or safer for its being tracked and crowded. We must enquire what we ought to do, not what the majority do."¹⁴⁷

Citizens of Heaven

- ✓ Philippians 1:27 ("let your conduct be" [NKJV], πολιτεύομαι: better, "discharge your obligations as citizens; cf. Acts 23:1*").
- ✓ Philippians 2:14–17 (you are "children of God ... in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast/forth the word of life").
- ✓ Philippians 3:20–21 ("our citizenship is in heaven" [NKJV], πολιτεύμα; cp. with πολιτεία in Acts 22:18; Eph. 2:12)

Summary Points and General Imperatives

1. Christians should not assume that legitimate civil disobedience will always result in deliverance. It does not (Hebrews 11:35–37; cf. Daniel 11:28–35).
2. Examples of illegitimate civil disobedience: Miriam and Aaron (Numbers 12), Kohath (Numbers 16), and Achan (Joshua 7).
3. The divine norm is obedience to the state, including these examples:
 - a. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem in obedience to Caesar's decree regarding a census (Luke 2).
 - b. Jesus Christ was not a threat to Roman authority, though He was to the Jewish religious establishment (John 18:33–38).
 - Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews.
 - Christ inquired as to his frame of reference—Jewish or Roman? The answer was "yes!" from the Jewish viewpoint and "no!" from the Roman.
 - The Roman viewpoint was what interested Pilate; thus, he said that Jesus was innocent.
 - Accordingly, Jesus was not an anarchist out to overthrow the Roman government. He did condemn, however, the Jewish religious establishment (Matthew 23).
4. Scripture condones disobedience to civil authority only when that authority usurps God's authority. Obey God rather than man.

¹⁴⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Eerdmans, 1988; 2002). Logos edition.

¹⁴⁶ Douglas K. Stuart, "Exodus," electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 2007) 2:524–25, says "The NIV translation 'crowd' ([Exodus 23:] v. 2) is not the only option. A better translation might be 'majority,' and the temptation warned against here is that of being swayed in any action that would be wrong by the fear of looking foolish, incorrect, odd, or dishonest because of taking a position different from that taken by everyone—or virtually everyone—else. God has created human beings to be socially integrative and to try to cooperate with one another. As a result, it can be extremely difficult to take a stance in a difficult and emotionally charged situation or legal case against the majority (possibly including many of one's friends or even family) in favor of a person or cause that has no other advocates. An example would be the temptation—in a court case against a person who already has a long record of improper behavior and whom virtually everyone would like to see punished—to join the majority in accusing that person of some sort of impropriety even when one has no actual direct knowledge the person is guilty. This law calls for individual believers, who in so many other cases are expected to conform to the group (as in worship or in keeping any apodictic law applicable to everyone at all times) to be willing to think and act as individuals clearly enough and righteously enough that they can stand against all others in their actions or testimony."

¹⁴⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Ex 23:1–9 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996). Logos edition.

- a. *Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge (Acts 4:19).*
- b. *Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).*
5. We have no evidence that political corruption in the state gives automatic grounds for civil disobedience.
 - a. Paul was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20).
 - b. Paul was beaten unlawfully and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:16-34; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; cf. Acts 22:24-29). He says that he was "in prisons more frequently" (2 Corinthians 11:23).
 - c. Paul was unjustly slapped in court, so he upbraided the high priest, not knowing who he was. When informed that he had reproached the high priest (civil judge), Paul deferred to the civil authority, even though it was corrupt (Acts 22:30-23:5).
 - d. Though the apostle often suffered unjust punishment at the hands of civil authorities, he never advocates treason against the Roman or provincial governments (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:24-26).
6. As a rule, scripture does not condone rebellion either because of the violation of the divine institutions, or of personal rights. The evidence is 1 Corinthians 7:21. The apostle addresses slaves whose rights to life, freedom, and property were smothered. Moreover, volition, divine institution #1, was stifled. Nevertheless, Paul instructs them to maintain the status quo, not rebel to correct the horrific evil. Cf. the book of Philemon. In addition, Scripture gives no green light to anarchy (doing what is right in one's own eyes). As a form of "treachery," the Bible censures anarchy (2 Timothy 3:4). "Despising authorities" is no small sin; in fact, it is tantamount to "witchcraft" (cf. 2 Peter 2:10 with 1 Samuel 15:23).
7. Biblical evidence suggests that abuses by, or political corruption in, the state does not give grounds for civil disobedience.
 - a. Paul was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20).
 - b. Paul was beaten unlawfully and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:16-34; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; cf. Acts 22:24-29).
 - c. Paul unjustly slapped-down in court so braced the High Priest not knowing who he was. When informed that he had reproached the priest (=civil judge), Paul deferred to the civil authority though corrupt (Acts 22:30-23:5).
 - d. Though the apostle often felt the unjust punishment of tyranny, he never advocated revolution against the Roman government (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:24-26).
8. Though Christians may disobey civil commands that contradict biblical commands, they should do so accepting the consequences without complaining or resorting to insurrection (see the contexts of the examples mentioned under Point 1 above; cf. Exodus 23:2).
9. When a Christian disobeys civil authority based on Scripture, his concern is to do what his conscience says is right—he obeys God rather than man, leaving results in the hands of the Lord. Whether deliverance or death is to be his lot, he does what he is persuaded is right.
10. Don't think or speak evil against authority
 - ✓ *Do not curse the king, even in your thought ... for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter (Ecclesiastes 10:20; cf. Titus 3:1-2).*
 - ✓ *Those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries (2 Peter 2:10).*
 - ✓ *Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries (Jude 8).*
11. Paul's use of Roman citizenship (a precedent for us!)
 - ✓ *So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city (Acts 16:36-39).*
 - ✓ *And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned" (Acts 22:25)?*
 - ✓ *So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25:10-11).*
12. Pray for all in authority
 - ✓ *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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 1-3).*

Final thoughts

King Saul vs. Jonathan
(1 Samuel 14:36–52)

³⁶Now Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." Then the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here."³⁷ So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day.³⁸ And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today."³⁹ For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him.⁴⁰ Then he said to all Israel, "You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you."⁴¹ Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, "Give a perfect lot." So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped.⁴² And Saul said, "Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me." So Jonathan was taken.⁴³ Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, and said, "I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!"⁴⁴ Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." (1 Samuel 14:36-44)

In the prior 35 verses of this chapter, King Saul's son, Jonathan, shows himself to be a remarkable believer and soldier. While the king lounges under a pomegranate tree well away from the heat of battle,¹⁴⁸ Jonathan single-handedly challenges a Philistine garrison, not because he has superior arms, numbers, or strategy, but because of faith in God's enablement. The highlight is his expression of faith: nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few,¹⁴⁹ coupled with his follow-through—a challenge to one of their garrisons. The Philistines accept his challenge but Jonathan kills about 20 of them, which, with divine intervention, caused panic to spread throughout the entire Philistine army.

His act of courage inspired the rest of the Hebrew army to engage the invaders main army throughout the day inflicting severe loses on them. King Saul, however, made a stupid oath forbidding his troops to eat anything until evening. He supposed that if they did not take time to eat, they would kill more Philistines. To the contrary, without nourishment, the men fought in a weakened condition, thus they killed fewer enemies combatants than they otherwise would have. Saul's oath had made eating anything before evening a capital crime. Jonathan, however, had not heard about the oath because instead of loafing, he had engaged and defeated the garrison. When he happened later to discover some honey, he helped himself and revived his energies.

As for the rest of the Hebrew army, when evening arrived, they had driven off the Philistines who fled leaving their supplies behind. The Hebrew soldiers, because of their hunger, rushed upon the sheep and cattle left behind. They gorged themselves eating the meat with the blood—a taboo of the Mosaic law—that earned them divine disapproval.

Saul continued to blunder his way through this day into the evening. Though his men were exhausted after fighting all day without nourishment, verse 36 reveals that Saul now wants to fight all night in order to take revenge on the rest of the Philistine army. When he asked the Lord for guidance, God did not answer leading Saul to discern that someone had violated his oath. Using a system of casting lots, much as Joshua had done to ferret out Achan after the Ai disaster, Jonathan's violation became known. Jonathan confessed and said "So now I must die" (14:43b). Saul immediately uttered another reckless oath that Jonathan was to be executed that led to a case of civil disobedience.

But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die. (1 Samuel 14:45)

Jonathan, being the principled man that he is and refusing to dodge the consequences of his actions, had said "So now I must die."¹⁵⁰ Regardless of Saul's directive, and Jonathan's willingness, the people say "No way!" Here is an observable example of civil disobedience, defying a directive of divinely appointed authority. And, though descriptive not prescriptive, it shows that those in authority cannot exercise authority without the consent of the people—not just a few disgruntled citizens, but a sufficient majority of individuals who perceive the injustice of the directive and draw a line in the sand. Note **the people said to Saul ... the people rescued Jonathan.**

Jonathan had shown throughout the day that God had been with him in a special way. He had acted with God's help (lit., "with God"), i.e., he could only have gained the victory with God's blessing. It would be morally wrong, and an offense against common sense and the law of God to condemn what God had approved. The stand of the army was right and godly. *An oath to commit a crime, in this case the execution of one who had not committed a capital crime, was an oath to be renounced, and not a duty to be performed.*¹⁵¹ (italics added)

¹⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 14:2.

¹⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 14:6.

¹⁵⁰ In the early years of the church dispensation, another man of integrity said the same thing. When Paul was on trial before Festus, he said, "if I have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying" (Acts 25:11).

¹⁵¹ James E. Smith, "1 & 2 Samuel," *The College Press NIV Commentary* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 2000) 195.

In light of the people's resistance, Saul backed away from his capital directive. The aftermath of this incident then turned positive for the king. The Lord delivered him and the nation from the current enemy invasion (14:46); he solidified his royal sovereignty (14:46-48); God blessed his posterity (14:49-52); and to wage continuous war, Saul drafted qualified military personnel (14:52).

Though his troops defied Saul's divinely given authority, they did not seek to overthrow him any more than David did on two occasions though in perfect position to do so.

Later in Israel's history, we discover another remarkable example of a king's authority being stoutly resisted: Uzziah arrogantly intruded into the priesthood, transgressing the limits of royal authority. The Levitical priests withstood the king without wavering (2 Chronicles 26:16-23). The Lord judged him with leprosy; but there was no attempt to dethrone him.

God Stirred Up

What if the magistrate believes that he has a right to make such [bad] laws and that they are for the public good, and his subjects believe the contrary? Who shall be judge between them? I answer: God alone. For there is no judge upon earth between the supreme magistrate and the people. God, I say, is the only Judge in this case, who will retribute unto every one at the last day according to his deserts; that is, according to his sincerity and uprightness in endeavouring to promote piety, and the public weal [well-being, prosperity], and peace of mankind. But what shall be done in the meanwhile. I answer: The principal and chief care of everyone ought to be of his own soul first, and, in the next place, of the public peace; though yet there are very few will think it is peace there, where they see all laid waste.

There are two sorts of contests amongst men, the one managed by law, the other by force; and these are of that nature that were the one ends, the other always begins.¹⁵²

Influenced by Locke, the Framers of the DoI said that "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it." And, when governmental authority "evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government."

Scripture does not give an explicit answer as to when a people, collectively, should rise up to defy, even overthrow existing corrupt civil authority. It does give explicit direction to individual Christians to arrange themselves under existing authority that God has established. Though several precedents exist for refusing submission.

So how does one know if God is initiating regime change from within his country and, thus, he should join the insurgency? How would we know whether we should help overthrow those in authority over us, thus setting aside personal submission? This is an important, yet inflammatory and sensitive subject. The USA's Founders Fathers seem to have sensed that when they said, "for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Scripture does not give systematic divine guidance in this matter; nevertheless, there are principles that come into play.

1. God works in us both to will and to do (Philippians 2:13).
 - "To will," for the purpose of this paper, denotes a desire, or conviction—a non-selfish ambition—to overthrow an evil and self-serving government. This must manifest itself in a large majority of the population, in contrast to a smaller disgruntled group clinging to preferred policies or objecting to undesirable governmental programs and/or changes.
 - "To do" speaks of the ability that must exist to follow through on the desire so that the majority is able successfully to terminate corrupt authorities, replacing them with good (not perfect) authorities. "Behind this language lies the thought of the sovereign Spirit stirring Christians to will and act in God-pleasing obedience (Philippians 2:12–13), and of prayerful Christian activism in which much is attempted for God in the knowledge that without Christ nothing significant can be achieved (John 15:5)."¹⁵³
2. Scripture records examples of regime change—the overthrow of existing governmental authority.
 - Ca. 1450 BC. God intervened in Egypt's national affairs in that He "raised up" Pharaoh to oppose Moses (Romans 9:17). The Lord did so to the end that by the destruction of Pharaoh's civil authority, God's power and name might be broadcast throughout the earth. That it happened is evidenced by the testimonies of Rahab (Joshua 2:8-11) and the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:5-8).
 - Ca. 1200 BC. The tribe of Benjamin was guilty of "lewdness and outrage in Israel," having raped and killed a Levite's concubine. When the report of the atrocity reached the rest of Israel, *the people arose as one man ... all the men of Israel were ... united together as one man.*¹⁵⁴ Though context does not explicitly say that God was behind their unanimity, it is safe to say that God stirred them up for He counsels them to go to battle against Benjamin (Judges 20:18-28).

¹⁵² Locke, *Toleration*, 35:17.

¹⁵³ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, Logos ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 318.

¹⁵⁴ Judges 20:8, 11.

- 722 BC. Because of moral disintegration in the Northern Kingdom, God stirred up the Assyrian Empire, put leadership into the hands of Shalmaneser V and his son, Sargon II, to take down Israel's existing authorities. Earlier in Israel's history, the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan to this day (1 Chronicles 5:26).
- 586 BC. Because of moral corruption in the Southern Kingdom, and to take down its existing authorities, God raised up Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonian Empire.
- 536 BC. Positively, God stirred up the spirit of a Persian king, Cyrus the Great, to restore the Jews back to their homeland (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).
- Other judgments against the Jews happened because God stirred up the spirit of Israel's enemies (2 Chronicles 21:16).

Though these examples show an outside force bringing about the overthrow of corrupt government, or blessing on Israel, the power behind the overthrow is God. In ways not identified, God so moved in the lives of foreign leaders, enabling them with sufficient military might, that regime change happened. As observed by hindsight, this happens according to God's timetable and working within nations, for example, in America's successful struggle for independence from Great Britain.

3. The operation of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, is secret, not being subject to human rational or empirical processes: *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.*¹⁵⁵ Jesus' context deals with the work of the Spirit in regeneration. Now, because we are not given insight or a timeline for the creation and destruction of specific nations, this too falls into the category of the "secret things" of God.¹⁵⁶ The point is that when God determines to bring down existing governing authorities, the Spirit will so work in the minds and hearts of a sufficient number of men that it happens.
4. Whether to establish, sustain, or overthrow civil authorities, God is at work in the hearts of governmental authorities: *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes* (Proverbs 21:1). Or, *the righteous God wisely considers the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness* (Proverbs 21:12). When the Almighty determines to bring down a ruler, He most likely will withhold wisdom from the evil ruler so that his political choices enable an insurgency to succeed.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville caught a glimpse of the moving of the Spirit among a population to accomplish regime change.

[T]he extraordinary French historian and prescient political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville explained, "When the traces of individual action upon nations are lost, it often happens that you see the world move without the impelling force being evident. As it becomes extremely difficult to discern and analyze the reasons that, acting separately on the will of each member of the community, concur in the end to produce movement in the whole mass, men are led to believe that his movement is involuntary and that societies unconsciously obey some superior force ruling over them. But even when the general fact that governs the private volition of all individuals is supposed to be discovered upon the earth, the principle of human free-will is not made certain. A cause sufficiently extensive to affect millions of men at once and sufficiently strong to bend them all together in the same direction may well seem irresistible, having seen that mankind do yield to it, the mind is close upon the inference that mankind cannot resist it."¹⁵⁷

Utopianism's equality is intolerant of diversity, uniqueness, debate, etc., for utopianism's purpose requires a singular focus. There can be no competing voices or causes slowing or obstructing society's long and righteous march. Utopianism relies on deceit, propaganda, dependence, intimidation, and force. In its more aggressive state, as the malignancy of the enterprise becomes more painful and its impossibility more obvious, it incites violence inasmuch as avenues for free expression and civil dissent are cut off. Violence becomes the individual's primary recourse and the state's primary response. Ultimately, the only way out is the state's termination. [in his endnote, Levin says "Whether recourse to violence builds into a popular uprising and whether the utopia survives depends on the nature of the utopia and myriad factors and events that are not the subject of this book."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ John 3:8.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Deuteronomy 29:29.

¹⁵⁷ Mark R. Levin, *Ameritopia: The Unmaking of America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012) 6.

¹⁵⁸ Levin, *Ameritopia*, 11 [endnote pg. 250]

Appendix

Some Government Is Better Than No Government¹⁵⁹

Participating in a society with a functioning government is the act of surrendering total personal freedom for the protections and benefits of that government-managed society. Whether that's a good idea or not depends completely on the balance between what benefits the government provides and how much the rights and especially the freedoms of citizens and others are infringed upon.

What kind of government is better than no government?□

In short, any government that isn't particularly bad -- I'll get to exactly what makes a government good or bad at their job later -- is better than no government at all. The ideal situation is one in which minimal rights are surrendered for maximum benefits. The argument behind this is one of simple utilitarian ethics: if you add up all of the benefits and all of the drawbacks of a decent government for each person that government affects (including non-citizens), I contend that the benefits usually outweigh the drawbacks. The benefits that such a government provides exist to ensure the maintenance of a functioning society in the face of a rather depressing fact: as much as we'd like to believe otherwise, by himself, the average person is illogical, unintelligent, and immoral. A proper government puts decision-making power in the hands of people with exactly the opposite set of traits. By doing so, it fulfills three objectives: (1) driving smart, organized focus on forward progress, (2) providing security by enforcing the moral imperative to protect the innocent, and most importantly (3), protecting rather than infringing on the rights of those it affects, even as it works toward the first two goals.□

When all else is equal, cohesive groups can accomplish more than disorganized individuals, and a proper government is a group which is particularly well suited to such a task. Simply stated, the average human's abilities to reason logically, comprehend complexity, and think for himself are frighteningly limited, in my opinion. It's easy to be a sheep, so most people are. If you don't believe me, you should go watch the film *Idiocracy*, look at some historical opinion polls about the tolerance of different religions (Wikipedia, CBS source), or look at average SAT scores over the years (Wikipedia). That's not to say that people who are less intelligent or logical deserve different treatment; in fact, a proper government does exactly the opposite and treats all people as individuals judged solely on their actions. However, an average individual or even a group of average individuals is statistically a whole lot less likely to move society forward in a meaningful way than a group of the best and brightest working to organize the entire society in a fair and just manner.

A proper government would be mostly just that: a cohesive group of the population's best leaders. I'm not arguing that great accomplishments can't be made by individuals or by non-governmental groups; of course they can. However, a proper government has two extra traits that separate it from other groups: (1) its aforementioned objectives are specific to the welfare of its domain with no other loyalties except to moral conduct, and (2) it has the authority to work toward those objectives. This combination -- keeping in mind that legality must flow from morality, which in turn flows from logic, and not the consensus of the potentially misguided people -- gives governments a better chance of affecting positive change, especially in a widespread manner, than many other groups. These tangible benefits allow a society to make forward progress with unified efforts that are guided by the best and brightest, whereas with a bad government or with no government, such efforts would be hampered by the average person's lack of logic, raw brainpower, and organizational capacity. Such efforts toward forward progress include public education, programs to raise the standard of living, funding art and science, managing the economy, and generally ensuring stability. I argue that a proper government is generally better positioned than any other individual or group to advance such programs on the scale needed to affect significant positive change, due to their pure objectives and recognized authority.□A proper government -- one acting with authority and morality -- provides a second major benefit to its hosting society: security. Some amount of security is necessary if people are to be generally free to do as they wish. As long as the opportunity to take advantage of or hurt others exists, especially given the correct circumstances and potential for personal gain, some vast percentage of humanity will individually or collectively do harm to their fellow man, and it's a proper government's job to do its best to prevent that. For those of us who are fortunate enough to live in a relatively stable society, where the majority of people have their most basic needs fulfilled and those that do not (e.g. the homeless) are largely powerless to harm us, security seems almost a given. Security is, for lucky people like that, the status quo. Such a person could walk into a local market, for example, and expect to find no violence, minimal theft, and generally friendly treatment. But it takes only a small change to break that pattern; if you've ever been in a car accident where one party lied to avoid the consequences of his punishment-worthy actions, or ever looked at motor vehicle hit-and-run statistics, you know exactly what I'm referring to. Now imagine that none of those people at the market had been able to eat for a few days. The veneer of peace, security, and civility is a thin one, even in the most well-to-do Western societies. The phrase "nine meals from anarchy" was liberally applied to describe some of the horrors of the recent London riots, and while there were many other motivating factors in these specific incidents, the phrase gets at something important in the heart of human nature. While part of a society, with friends, family, and strangers all around observing one's actions, most people tend to act properly -- especially morally -- so as to garner the favor of those close to them. We call someone who doesn't fit that description a sociopath: someone who specifically ignores or actively rejects society's rules. However, I contend that given the appropriate circumstances -- especially a position of opportunity and freedom from retribution or shame -- most people are easily capable of sociopathic actions. It is a rare individual who would do the right thing, every time, especially when the situation calls for personal sacrifice and when he knows that the person he is helping would never do the same for him. To achieve a very raw, gut understanding of what I mean, read *Animal Farm* or *Lord of the Flies*. As a corollary, consider a major function of many religions, especially those which claim all-knowing deities or forces (e.g. the Christian angel on the shoulder or the Indian notion of karma; see also Bentham's Panopticon for a philosophical equivalent). Such religions seek to make their followers believe they are being watched at all times, so that they will act morally even when a logical cost-benefit analysis shows no drawback (except immorality) to taking an immoral action. That so many religions feature at their core the fairy-tale concept that sins or immoral actions will be

¹⁵⁹ This essay was downloaded from the Internet on 3-3-12, <http://bigtalk.info/?q=node/13>. It is an example of seeking solutions to bad government apart from divine revelation.

observed by higher powers and that in many cases the actor will receive some form of divine retribution is a telling testimony to the fact that “because it’s the right thing to do” is not enough to motivate most people to actually do the right thing. While many contend that complete anarchy wouldn’t be so bad, I argue that such people delude themselves with the belief that most people are truly moral, and that they’ve been proven wrong by history time and time again. The recent London riots or the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans are two recent examples out of many, and while it doesn’t always come to that sort of societal breakdown, it seems to more often than not. Without a certain amount of security, accountability, and sense of oversight (i.e. “there’s a decent chance I’ll be caught and face the consequences”), civilization can and often does break down quite quickly, and then there’s little preventing an immoral person from harming others however he wishes. It is the responsibility of a proper government to do its best to provide such security in order to prevent harm that would be caused by individuals and groups who would otherwise take immoral actions. □

The third -- and in my opinion the most important -- responsibility of a proper government is to enumerate the rights of all, especially its citizens, and to protect those rights through policy and action. As with other policies, such rights should be chosen based on reason and the morality that stems from reason, as opposed to religion, emotionally-driven legislation, lobbying, etc. It’s particularly important not to base such decisions on the (moral) consensus of the populace. For many reasons, especially aforementioned claims relating to the average person’s lack of intelligence, reason, and morality, governments following their people’s moral or ideological consensus in a democratic fashion have actually proven to be some of the most dangerous entities in history. Consider the ancient Greek Mytilenian Debate, the relatively democratically elected rise of the National Socialist party in pre-WWII Germany, Japanese-American internment camps of WWII, or any government that has ever legally supported slavery. The phrase “none of us is as stupid as all of us” and the origin of the word “mob” -- vulgar Latin for “fickle commoners” -- go a long way in explaining why a proper government must choose what is right based on logic and morality and not based on the fickle will of its people. If you don’t believe me, consider the statistics above regarding American tolerance of Muslims before and after 9/11, and then consider what would have happened if on 9/12 a declaration of war on half of the Middle East were put to a fully democratic national vote. It is up to each society to put forward its best and brightest to enumerate the rights it will protect and to do its best to protect those rights. □

While these three responsibilities -- advancing society, protecting society, and protecting rights -- are well and good on their own, conflicts between these aims are inevitable. A government which does its best to advance society -- as discussed above as a primary responsibility -- risks damaging the rights of groups and individuals in the process. Recent attacks on the right to anonymity and free, secure communication, especially over the internet, are a perfect example of progress infringing on rights in a dangerous way. Further, many governmental measures intended to increase security even further violate said rights, especially in our age of international terrorism. Neither of these trade-offs are acceptable unless the survival of the society depends on temporarily violating these rights, and even then, whether such a trade-off is worthwhile is up for debate. The government should do everything it can in fulfilling its first two goals -- the advancement of society and the securing of society -- without ever crossing the line and breaking with its mandate to protect the rights of the people. A society that does not preserve basic rights of individuals and groups is itself not worth preserving. It’s important to note here that a government must choose carefully when asserting its view of rights, morality, security, and progress in the face of another group or government that disagrees. There is a fine balance between respecting each individual’s and each society’s right to choose its own path and allowing those societies to act immorally; this argument is extremely relevant to the recent United Nations intervention in Libya, and it is both a potentially great boon to worldwide freedom and also a very slippery slope to forcing your government’s will on others who would prefer to seek their own path. This is an entirely separate topic of its own, and one that we’ll hopefully examine in the future. The trade-off between freedom and security, however, is extremely pertinent to this debate, and thus merits further examination. □

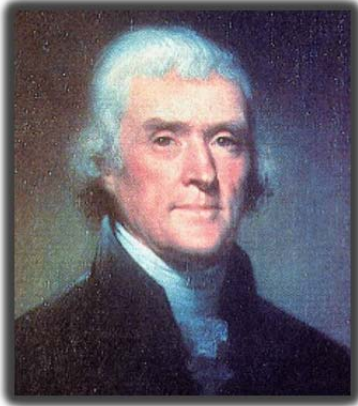
Benjamin Franklin said it best: “They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.” Rights, particularly personal freedoms, are of course curtailed as part of most societies, and certainly under most authoritative governments, when compared to the complete personal freedom of anarchy. There’s nothing wrong with that; as previously discussed, the cost of some limitation of personal rights is low compared to the government’s protection of all rights that remain, so that specific trade-off makes sense. Trading rights for safety, however, only makes sense to a point. For example, consider the laudable goal of the assurance of personal safety for all citizens. It sounds perfectly reasonable on the surface, but pursuing it unilaterally without regard for rights is exceedingly dangerous. At some point down that road, we’d all be living in rooms with padded walls and nourished with feeding tubes; while that would be safer, the cost obviously isn’t worth it. But where do we draw the line? How many of your rights are you willing to trade for the safety of yourself and your fellow citizens? To answer that question logically, you should evaluate each trade-off with simple cost/benefit reasoning, and never forget the potential for abuse, especially by those in power. Some measures are of course worth taking. For example, an American’s freedom of speech as guaranteed by the first amendment to the US constitution is curtailed by laws regarding slander, libel, obscenity, and other cases. The downside to these limitations is that I may not say exactly what I want at all times without risking legal consequences, but on the whole, my ability to make important statements is not drastically reduced. For the most part I can still find a way to say what I need to say without violating those laws, though there have been historical abuses (consider the censorship of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*). However, one advantage of giving up my right to completely free speech is that if a fellow citizen publicly lies in order to damage the reputation of my business, I can seek legal recourse. This is an excellent example of a trade-off which is usually worth it, because the rights that are curtailed are outweighed by the benefits and the protections such legislation holds over other rights. Now consider some examples of unreasonable trade-offs. Anyone can be put on the US Transportation Safety Authority’s no fly list with no way to find out they are on it or challenge the decision. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can order Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to seize your web domain because you were accused -- not convicted, and not given a chance to defend yourself in court -- of doing something illegal on your website. Sure, it’s all well and good when this law is used to attack child pornographers or hackers, but what about when your business’ website is shut down because someone from a media conglomerate with the ear of a senator accused you of linking to a website which disagrees with them? This is especially unreasonable because the appeals process is exceedingly broken. Not only are you considered guilty until proven innocent without a chance to prove your innocence via due process, but it’s quite difficult to reverse the decision. In the meantime, anyone visiting your business’ website sees the same notice they’d see on the seized domain of child pornographers. Obviously, the

potential for misuse and abuse, and the egregious violation of the right to due process make this example a clear case for a poor governmental decision, trading away critical individual rights for little gain. The child pornographers will have a new site hosted in another country up and running in no time, but legitimate enterprises accidentally targeted can easily be put out of business; there's no shortage of evidence of both of these things happening (see Senator Wyden's letter pointing out the absurdities and illegalities of such measures). Or consider the Department of Homeland Security's recent move to combine all of its secret watchlists into a brand new combined secret watchlist, for which there is again no oversight, no due process, and no way for a citizen to even find out he's being watched (and probably targeted for illegal warrantless surveillance, again without due process). These are all clear-cut recent examples of decisions made by the US government which curtail rights for virtually meaningless gains in security. Not only are these measures extremely ineffective -- security researcher Bruce Schneier aptly coined the term "security theater" to refer to such measures because they serve no purpose except to convince uninformed citizens that their tax dollars are protecting them in a useful manner -- but they curtail the rights of individuals in an unacceptable manner. Now consider an extreme example: the executive branch of the government of the United States now claims it has the legal authority to order the assassination of American citizens without trial (qawker.com). I'm pretty sure the Constitution has something to say about due process, especially when it comes to ordering the murder of American citizens. We're doing this all over the world, in fact: United States Special Forces are deployed in approximately 120 countries at the moment. Such a violation of individual rights, even for the purpose of saving lives, is clearly unacceptable. There are, of course, many more difficult decisions in balancing rights and security. Even rights champion Abraham Lincoln suspended the right to habeas corpus -- the protection against, among other things, unlawful imprisonment -- during the Civil War. A brief look at US policy regarding habeas corpus in the 21st century shows that the US government continues to abuse the precedent set by Lincoln during the Civil War and by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during WWII; the CIA's extraordinary rendition program and the indefinite detentions at the Guantanamo Bay facility are only the beginning. These are all examples of very real trade-offs that the US government has made on behalf of its citizens, most of which are so suspect that they barely pass the laugh test, never mind a brief inspection of the US constitution or a simple debate about morality. While most world governments could stand a great deal of improvement in their pursuit of the advancement of civilization and security, in this day and age, the great reversal of our most cherished rights by "freely elected governments acting in the best interest of their people and the world" is to me the most disconcerting hallmark of this age. Fomenting fear (especially through mass media), monetizing it (consider the Halliburton corporation, for example), consolidating power with it (consider the US' PATRIOT Act, for example), and fooling most citizens into thinking you're doing something about it (consider the aforementioned security theater, or the war in Iraq for non-existent weapons of mass destruction) are all truly horrifying things for a government to do, and not at all in the spirit of the proper government described earlier. □

Everyone has the right to evaluate these trade-offs on their own, but in my opinion, I'd rather live in a country where the chances of being killed by a terrorist are significantly higher (right now, you're hundreds if not thousands of times more likely to be killed in an auto accident) but the government isn't stamping all over my individual rights. Franklin, as well as the New Hampshire state motto ("Live free or die!") are right: life isn't worth living if you can't live with a degree of freedom. Hunting Bin Laden alone cost \$3 trillion over 15 years and the greatest erosion of individual rights our generation has seen under the guise of supposedly legal action. These silly policies are the result of the very fear-mongering and fickle mob I just described. Sure, terrorism is scary, and that's the point: the psychological impact on the civilian populace is intended to be drastically disproportionate to the small number of deaths caused. But a proper government should base its policies on logic, morality, and if possible, hard data, not on appearance and fright. A quick look at the some historical statistics shows that deaths due to terrorism pale in comparison to deaths from auto accidents, lightning strikes, animal attacks, or even falling down the stairs, and we should meet all of these threats in proportion to their danger. For the sake of security, the erosion of rights and freedoms should, to a point, also mirror the danger. In other words, a government which is more concerned with making roads more safe or fighting heart disease than combating international terrorism -- in terms of spending, effort, and erosion of rights - - is doing a better job because it bases its policies based on logic, not on fear. □

In summary, I offer the following description of a government which is doing its job: to the best of its ability, it seeks to advance its society in a morally and logically positive manner, seeks to secure its society, and above all else seeks to guarantee the basic rights of its citizens and all others under its domain. Of course, it's impossible to actually build such a government, but that's no reason not to strive for these lofty goals, and to use them to guide our decisions as we face the future. The primary obstacle in most governments to such progress, though, is that such a proper government is less powerful. Of course, a government which is less powerful is a less ideal vehicle for those who do seek power, and most governments are filled with exactly that kind of person. In other words, the power to move a government toward this ideal is held -- and this is true across practically all modern forms of government -- by people who would be acting against their own best interest by enacting such reforms. And as discussed above, very few people are moral enough to do the right thing when it's against their best interest and there are no negative consequences to maintaining the status quo. Further, power-seeking individuals and groups have become exceedingly skilled at manipulating the average citizen, which as previously discussed is trivially easy to do. Especially in an age of modern mass media and exceedingly silly partisanship, citizens are easily distracted from the biggest dangers: measures contrary to the concept of a proper government described herein that all those in power, regardless of party, agree on (such as the recent bipartisan renewal of the PATRIOT Act). Of course, there are plenty of people out there who are intelligent enough to think for themselves, and thus know better than the average man, but if they're not power seekers themselves, they're generally in no position to do anything about it except talk. That, in a nutshell, is why I wrote this. ♣

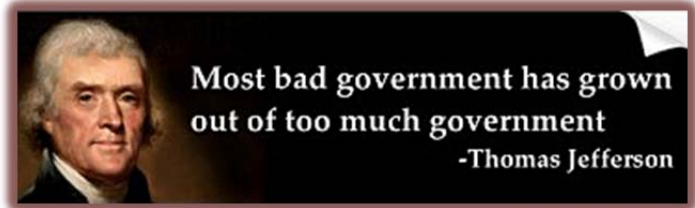
**Quotations
from Thomas Jefferson.**¹⁶⁰



- What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?
- The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all.
- The majority, oppressing an individual, is guilty of a crime, abuses its strength, and by acting on the law of the strongest breaks up the foundations of society.
- When wrongs are pressed because it is believed they will be borne, resistance becomes morality.
- Were we directed from Washington when to sow and when to reap, we should soon want bread.
- The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.
- The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.
- God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion. The people

cannot be all, and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented, in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.... And what country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time, that this people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to the facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

- Of liberty I would say that, in the whole plenitude of its extent, it is unobstructed action according to our will. But rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add "within the limits of the law," because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual.



Not to be taken lightly! Remember the words of the signers of the DoI: "for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." Participation in treason is a hill one must be prepared to die on.

--End--

¹⁶⁰ Downloaded from the web on 3-1-12, <http://jpetrie.myweb.uga.edu/TJ.html>.