

# REDEEMING THE TIME

*“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16).*

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## *ICCC churches in India help those in need*

**T**he nation of India has been hit with several catastrophes in recent months. From devastating cyclones to the loss of jobs and other effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, many are in desperate need. The member churches of the International Council of Christian Churches in India have undertaken a ministry of compassion — from Kerala, in the south, to Darjeeling, in the north. Please be in prayer for those who are suffering around the world.



## “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”


BY BRAD K. GSELL

**W**ith the unprecedented impact that COVID-19 and destructive anarchy across the United States have had on all of our lives, the issue has arisen anew as to the Biblical teaching concerning human government, and the Christian’s responsibility to it.

**There may be different opinions** as to specific actions of our government leaders, but **we must not forget that the Word of God is “the only infallible rule of faith and practice,”** to quote a longstanding phrase in the Presbyterian Form of Government.<sup>1</sup> The answer to Westminster Shorter Catechism question 3 tells us that: “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” It is therefore important for

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# REFORMATION



## *Beginnings*

### PART XI

#### The Invincible Monk

BY MARK W. EVANS

**M**artin Luther's ten month stay at the Castle of Wartburg was a turning point in his life and in the Reformation. He had time to meditate on the sacred Scriptures and to translate the New Testament into the German language. A fire was lit that could not be extinguished. Rome's doctrine, worship, government, and discipline by persecution were condemned and replaced by the faith and practice of God's Holy Word. Countless souls were set free by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The edifice of Rome's religion was shaken to its foundations.

The reformer was filled with anxious thoughts as he remained separated from his friends and associates. He feared he might be accused of leaving the field of battle. He said, "I would rather be stretched on coals of fire, than lie here half-dead."<sup>1</sup> His heart was comforted in the hope that his

friend Phillip Melancthon would advance the Reformation. He wrote him a letter, charging him to remain faithful: "Minister of the Word! keep the walls and towers of Jerusalem until you are struck down by the enemy. As yet we stand alone upon the field of battle; after me, they will aim their blows at you."<sup>2</sup>

Luther faced physical afflictions. He experienced insomnia, pain from an old ailment, and times of sickness. His guardians were forced to yield to his plea for a monk's meager, coarse diet. He fell into times of dark thoughts, only to rise again triumphant in victorious faith. He praised the Savior for his afflictions: "Thanks be to Thee, O Christ, that Thou wilt not leave me without the precious marks of Thy cross!"<sup>3</sup> Yet, he felt his daily failures: "Madman and hard-hearted that I am! Woe is me! I pray seldom, I seldom wrestle with the Lord, I groan not for the Church of God! Instead of

being fervent in spirit my passions take fire; I live in idleness, in sleep and indolence!"<sup>4</sup>

The monk's definition of "idleness" has no resemblance to modern understanding. He wrote in a letter: "I am here all day in idleness and pleasures. I am reading the Bible in Hebrew and Greek; I am going to write a treatise in German on Auricular Confession; I shall continue the translation of the Psalms, and compose a volume of sermons, so soon as I have received what I want from Wittenberg. I am writing without intermission."<sup>5</sup> He wrote in another communication: "I have brought out a reply to Catharinus and another to Latomus, and in German a work on confession, expositions of Psalms 67 and 36, a commentary on the Magnificat, and a translation of Melancthon's reply to the University of Paris. I have under way a volume of sermons on the lessons from the [E]pistles and Gospels. I am attacking the Cardinal of Mainz and expounding the ten lepers."<sup>6</sup> These lists contain only a partial account of his endeavors.

His attack upon Albert, Cardinal of Mainz, concerned the prelate's plan to reopen the lucrative trade of selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. The cardinal-electoral was emboldened by the news that Emperor Charles V had declared Luther guilty of high-treason and had ordered his seizure. Luther was incensed at the cardinal. Defying all warnings, he wrote a blistering treatise against Albert. The treatise was so caustic that friends had to suggest numerous corrections. Luther decided to send the cardinal a preliminary letter:

"Your electoral highness has set up again in Halle the idol that swallows the money and the souls of poor Christians. You think, perhaps, that I am disabled, and that the emperor will easily stifle the cries of the poor monk.... But I know that I shall discharge the duties that Christian charity has imposed upon me, without fearing the gates of hell, much less the pope, his bishops, and cardinals.

“For this reason my humble prayer is, that your electoral highness would remember the beginning of this affair — how from one tiny spark proceeded so terrible a conflagration. All the world was at that time in a state of security. This poor begging friar (thought they), who unaided would attack the pope, is too weak for such an undertaking. But God interposed; and He caused the pope more labor and anxiety than he had ever felt since he had taken his place in the temple of God to tyrannize over the Church. This same God still lives: let none doubt it. He will know how to withstand a cardinal of Mentz [Mainz],

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even were he supported by four emperors; for He is pleased above all things to hew down the lofty cedars and to abase the haughty Pharaohs.

“For this reason I inform your highness by letter, that if the idol is not thrown down, I must in obedience to God’s teaching, publicly attack your highness, as I have attacked the pope himself. Let your highness conduct yourself in accordance with this advice, I shall wait a fortnight for an early and favorable reply.”<sup>7</sup>

When Albert received the letter, he struggled between anger and expediency. He determined to take the safer road. The cardinal wrote:

“My dear Doctor, I have received and read your letter, and have taken it in good part. But I think the motive that has led you to write me such an epistle has long ceased to exist. I desire, with God’s help, to conduct my-

self as a pious bishop and a Christian prince, and I confess my need of the grace of God. I do not deny that I am a sinner, liable to sin and error, sinning and erring daily. I am well assured that without God’s grace I am worthless and offensive mire, even as other men, if not more so. In replying to your letter, I would not conceal this gracious disposition; for I am more than desirous of showing you all kindness and favor, for love of Christ. I know how to receive a Christian and fraternal rebuke.”<sup>8</sup>

Although Luther achieved his purpose, he doubted the cardinal’s sincerity. Church historian J.H. Merle d’Aubigné recorded Luther’s sentiments: “[T]hat so long as the archbishop, who was hardly capable of managing a small parish, did not lay aside his cardinal’s mask and episcopal pomp, and become a simple minister of the Word, it was impossible that he could be in the way of salvation.”<sup>9</sup>

Luther’s confinement allowed him to labor on a treasured project. He began and completed a translation of the New Testament into the German language. Although essential Christian teachings were published and widely distributed through his books, few individuals had access to the written Scriptures. Some scholars had attempted translations, but their wording was cumbersome and the Book was extremely expensive. Luther had a goal: “Would that this one Book were in every language, in every hand, before the eyes, and in the ears and hearts of all men!”<sup>10</sup>

The reformer finished his translation just before leaving the Castle of Wartburg. These holy writings refuted Rome’s superstitions and false teachings and enabled countless souls to “embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered in the Gospel.” He would later complete the translation of the Old Testament. By God’s grace, the Bible brought Germany and many other countries out of the Dark Ages and broke the chains of ecclesiastical and civil tyranny.

D’Aubigné wrote: “From that time the Reformation was no longer in the hands of the reformer. The Bible came forward: Luther withdrew. God appeared, and man disappeared. The reformer placed The Book in the hands of his contemporaries. Each one may now hear the voice of God for himself: as for Luther, henceforth he mingled with the crowd, and took his station in the ranks of those who come to draw from the common Fountain of light and life.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.H. Merle d’Aubigné, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 464.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465-466.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 466.

<sup>6</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup>J.H. Merle d’Aubigné, pp. 476, 478.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 477-478.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 479.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*



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## REDEEMING THE TIME

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## **“LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT ...”**

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the child of God to compare Scripture with Scripture to determine the will of God as to any circumstance he may face in his life. This principle is no less applicable to the attitude and practice we should have as citizens of our earthly country.

### **God has created man to be free and responsible directly to Him**

Genesis 1:27 tells us: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” The fall of man greatly marred this image, yet many things remain. Man has a spiritual and immortal soul. Man has been given intellect and reason, and was given the command to rule over the earth and subdue it. Man is the zenith of God’s creation.

In our relationship to God, Romans 14:12 tells us “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Neither the State, nor any other group of people, can ever do this collectively. The responsibility and the relationship is individual — between each man and God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20:2, states well that: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word....”

### **God has established human government — not anarchy**

If each man is directly responsible to God, then it may seem logical that there is no need for human government. The Bible speaks of times when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6 and 21:25). This is a condition we often refer to as anarchy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines this as “A state

of disorder due to absence or non-recognition of authority or other controlling systems.” The United States is today experiencing this, as rioters, arsonists and looters are allowed to perform their destruction unabated in the streets.

This is not at all God’s revealed will, since God is a God of order and is not the author of confusion. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 13:1, tells us: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” In verse 4, he tells us that the ruler is “the minister of God to thee for good.”

### **“The greatest good the State can possibly furnish its citizens is freedom.”**

Carl McIntire

John Calvin states concerning Romans 13:1: “For though tyrannies and unjust exercise of power, as they are full of disorder (*ἀταξία*), are not an ordained government; yet the right of government is ordained by God for the wellbeing of mankind.”

Paul was writing this epistle at a time when Rome was ruling the Holy Land. Many Jews felt they had no obligation to obey Roman authority. After all, they were God’s chosen people, and who were these heathen rulers to think they could have authority over them?

In every area of life, God has established authority and subjection. The Fifth Commandment tells children of all ages to: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12).

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 64 instructs us: “The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.” Although this commandment refers to the rela-

tionship of a child to his parents, the Scriptures speak of the duties of all of us to each other: children to parents, husbands and wives to each other, each of us to civil government, and each of us to God, and so forth.

### **The power of the State and individual freedom are not mutually exclusive**

Carl McIntire states well that, as “the minister of God to thee for good” (Romans 13:4), “The greatest good the State can possibly furnish its citizens is freedom.”<sup>2</sup>

He continues: “The one service, the true function of the State, is not to provide food, clothing, and shelter for its servants, but to provide freedom for its citizens to rule. That our founding fathers placed liberty above life itself, and thus confirmed this teaching of Scripture, is evidenced also by their popular acceptance of the blessed American text: ‘Give me liberty, or give me death!’ The greatest blessing and good in this whole notion of liberty is seen when we observe that Paul’s statement indicates good for the individual. He says, ‘to *thee* for good.’ It is singular; the one must be protected against the many. The one must have his freedom with or without the many. It is not a case of the greatest good for the greatest number, as we so frequently hear today — such is a false, totalitarian slogan — but it is the greatest good for the one — each one — and this will therefore mean for all. This is liberty.”<sup>3</sup>

McIntire wrote during the time when the blight of communism controlled large segments of the earth’s population. Even though the political landscape has changed quite a bit, communism still controls a number of nations. Countries like the United States are presently in great danger of devolving into socialism, or worse, as it is fast becoming a nation that has forgotten God and Biblical precepts. The dangers of which he speaks are present everywhere in 2020.

Under such totalitarian regimes, he observes that “The State, instead of being the minister of God, becomes a minister of itself. Instead of being a minister of God for good, it becomes a minister of itself for its own idea — evil....”<sup>4</sup> “The good in a free society produces free men before God; the good in the communistic society produces slaves under the State.... To every God-fearing man and State the greatest security is liberty itself, and to those who forget God the greatest freedom is security itself.... If the State is going to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and charity for the people, and thus control or plan their economic life, it must control the people to these ends. To control man’s economy, man’s life must be controlled — and this is tyranny. This is one reason there is no essential difference between the principles of socialism and communism.”<sup>5</sup>

“... The State must be the protector of the right of conscience among its people. If not, the people cease to be free, and are enslaved. For the State, therefore, to destroy or to permit any group within it to destroy the right of conscience among its citizens is to make subjects, then beasts out of free men. In a free State man has a conscience.”<sup>6</sup>

These Biblical precepts were present in the thinking of many of the clergymen and leaders as the United States was settled. William Penn, who was given private ownership of Pennsylvania, produced a Charter of Privileges for the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, and also for Delaware, in 1701. In the very first section, it stated: “BECAUSE no People can be truly happy, though under the greatest Enjoyment of Civil Liberties, if abridged of the Freedom of their Consciences, as to their Religious Profession and Worship: And Almighty God being the only Lord of Conscience, Father of Lights and Spirits; and the Author as well as Object of all divine Knowledge, Faith and Worship, who only doth enlighten the Minds, and persuade and convince the Understand-

ings of People, I do hereby grant and declare, That no Person or Persons, inhabiting in this Province or Territories, who shall confess and acknowledge One almighty God, the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the World; and profess him or themselves obliged to live quietly under the Civil Government, shall be in any Case molested or prejudiced, in his or their Person or Estate, because of his or their conscientious Persuasion or Practice, nor be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious Worship, Place or Ministry, contrary to his or their Mind, or to do or suffer any other Act or Thing, contrary to their religious Persuasion.”

### **We are to submit to all lawful authority**

These issues have been widely discussed since the time of Christ. Church fathers such as Augustine and John Calvin devoted no little time to the consideration of these points.

Human government has been established for the good ordering of society, the protection of the citizens, and to allow all to flourish in freedom and liberty of conscience. Paul says in Romans 13:3: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same....” He continues in verses 4-7: “But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”

Paul repeats these teachings elsewhere. In writing to Titus, he instructs him to: “Put them in mind to be sub-

ject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1). Matthew Henry comments concerning this verse that we should “be subject to them [rulers] and obey them in things lawful and honest, and which it belongs to their office to require.”<sup>7</sup>

We are to follow the law, pay our taxes and other things required, even if we don’t like them. Jesus Christ Himself said: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s” (Luke 20:25).

Peter instructs us: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for

**“... The State must be the protector of the right of conscience among its people. If not, the people cease to be free, and are enslaved. For the State, therefore, to destroy or to permit any group within it to destroy the right of conscience among its citizens is to make subjects, then beasts out of free men. In a free State man has a conscience.”**

Carl McIntire

the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17).

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## **"LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT ..."**

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This is not optional. Paul writes: "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans 13:2).

### **What duty and limits does God place on earthly authority?**

There are those who believe that Romans 13 teaches that all rulers should be obeyed without question, that since they are "ordained of God," we should never oppose them. In 17th century England, the doctrine of "the divine right of kings" was propagated. Coupled with this was the belief that since the king had all responsibility under God, thus the citizenry had no option but to passively obey.

In discussing civil government, John Calvin refutes this error, stating that "flattering courtiers cloak themselves, and deceive the simple, when they deny the lawfulness of declining anything imposed by their kings, as if the Lord had resigned his own rights to mortals by appointing them to rule over their fellows...."<sup>8</sup>

Charles Hodge argues concerning verse 2: "If it is the will of God that there should be civil government, and persons appointed to exercise authority over others, it is plain that to resist such persons in the exercise of their lawful authority is an act of disobedience to God.... They are to be obeyed as magistrates, in the exercise of their lawful authority. When Paul commands wives to obey their husbands, they are required to obey them as husbands, not as masters, nor as kings; children are to obey their parents as parents, not as sovereigns; and so in every other case. This passage, therefore, affords a very slight foundation for the doctrine of passive obedience."<sup>9</sup>

Concerning verse 4, Hodge writes: "Magistrates or rulers are not ap-

**The United States has always prided itself of its "rugged individualism."**

**This somewhat has its roots in the concept that each man is responsible directly to God. But, we must be most cautious that our individualism is not prideful and self-serving, but rather is in godly subjection and obedience to the Scriptures, and in love for our neighbor.**

pointed for their own honor or advantage, but for the benefit of society, and, therefore, while those in subjection are on this account to obey them, they themselves are taught, what those in power are so apt to forget, that they are the servants of the people as well as the servants of God, and that the welfare of society is the only legitimate object which they as rulers are at liberty to pursue."<sup>10</sup>

John Calvin comments likewise on this verse: "Magistrates may hence learn what their vocation is, for they are not to rule for their own interest, but for the public good; nor are they endued with unbridled power, but what is restricted to the wellbeing of their subjects; in short, they are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their power."<sup>11</sup>

Carl McIntire writes concerning Romans 13:1: "The State has no power except what is given to it by God, it being, therefore, responsible to God.... The power, given by God, the State exercises by His permission.... God in His providence brought into being each State in order that He might use it; and governments, if they would please Him and serve His purposes, must operate under His law.... Paul is telling Christians that they should submit to the power of the government, and he means lawful government."<sup>12</sup>

McIntire continues: "If the State is to be the 'minister of God to thee for good,' is the State to determine that standard, or is God to determine it? The answer is in the phrase 'the minister of God.' It is the task of the State to minister as God would have it minister. That means that the standard of good, in the judgment of the State, must be what God has ordained. This immediately brings us back face to face with all the Ten Commandments. We cannot get away from them, neither can we let our State get away from them, so long as we recognize God's sovereignty over man. This is the reason the State has written into its laws protections for property, life, limb, and truth."<sup>13</sup>

### **Good Citizens, Good Works, and the Law of God**

It is interesting that in discussing submission to earthly governments, Paul ties it to doing "that which is good" to the Roman Christians, and "to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" to Titus. The child of God, producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and obeying the Word of God will be the model citizen.

Commenting on Romans 13:3, Charles Hodge writes: "'*Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.*' That is, government is not an evil to be feared, except by evil doers. As the magistrates are appointed for the punishment of evil, the way to avoid suffering from their authority is not to resist it, but to do that which is good. Paul is speaking of the legitimate design of government, not of the abuse of power by wicked men."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Peter tells us: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15). Only if we do such things are we to fear our rulers.

In Romans 13, Paul wastes little time in tying these "good works" to

the Law of God, particularly the commandments dealing with our relationship with other men. In verses 8 through 10, he writes: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” In verse 13, he writes: “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.”

As individuals, we are responsible directly to God. The United States has always prided itself of its “rugged individualism.” But, we must be most cautious that our individualism is not prideful and self-serving, but rather is in godly subjection and obedience to the Scriptures, and in love for our neighbor.

We are commanded to: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4); “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32); “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10), and so forth.

In the verses leading up to Romans 13, Paul writes: “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

We are not to be rebellious in our freedom. When discussing subjection to the magistrate to Titus, Paul concludes chapter 3, verse 2, by saying: “shewing all meekness unto all men.”

Further, Paul tells Timothy: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, suppli-

cations, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

John Calvin writes concerning these verses: “And, indeed, the depravity of men is not a reason why God’s ordinance should not be loved. Accordingly, seeing that God appointed magistrates and princes for the preservation of mankind, however much they fall short of the divine appointment, still we must not on that account cease to love what belongs to God, and to desire that it may remain in force. That is the reason why believers, in whatever country they live, must not only obey the laws and the government of the magistrates, but likewise in their prayers supplicate God for their salvation.”<sup>15</sup>

#### What about non-Christian rulers?

It is tempting to say that in Romans 13 Paul was talking only about ideal government where rulers are in complete obedience and subjection to God. Yet, he was writing when the Romans were ruling over the Holy Land. Nonetheless, he still said that we should be subject to them and honor them.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 23, “On the Civil Magistrate,” states that: “It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience’ sake. Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate’s just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him....”

It is important to recognize that even these “ministers of God” are ordained of God. When we trust in God’s complete sovereignty, we can say with Daniel: “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might

are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings ...” (Daniel 2:20-21).

#### Does God use wicked rulers?

We might protest that wicked rulers are the enemies of God, not His “ministers.” Yet, the Bible shows us many times where God has used wicked men to chastise and correct His stubborn children.

**“It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience’ sake. Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate’s just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him....”**

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 23

John Calvin, states concerning Romans 13:3: “But he [Paul] speaks here of the true, and, as it were, of the native duty of the magistrate, from which however they who hold power often degenerate; yet the obedience due to princes ought to be rendered to them. For since a wicked prince is the Lord’s scourge to punish the sins of the people, let us remember, that it happens through our fault that this excellent blessing of God is turned into a curse.”<sup>16</sup>

In Jeremiah 25:8-9, God actually calls the wicked king of Babylon “my servant.” He used this wicked ruler to punish and correct His people, because they had not obeyed Him.

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## **"LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT ..."**

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"Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof...."

God told Habakkuk: "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs." (Habakkuk 1:6).

The Bible even tells us that "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them [the children of Israel]; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses" (Exodus 9:12). This was all part of God's sovereign plan.

We must recognize that God does what is best, and it is not up to us to question His will. Daniel 4:35 states

**"Magistrates ... are not to rule for their own interest, but for the public good; nor are they endued with unbridled power, but what is restricted to the wellbeing of their subjects; in short, they are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their power."**

John Calvin

this very well: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

When Christians do suffer at the hands of wicked rulers, John Calvin

writes: "For verily, Christians were to be a class of men born to endure affronts and injuries, and be exposed to the iniquity, imposture, and derision of abandoned men, and not only so, but were to be tolerant of all these evils; that is, so composed in the whole frame of their minds, that, on receiving one offence, they were to prepare themselves for another, promising themselves nothing during the whole of life but the endurance of a perpetual cross."<sup>17</sup>

### **May we ever disobey the government?**

When a government overreaches its authority and commands us to do that which is in disobedience to God's Word, we must disobey. In Acts 5:28-29, "the captain with the officers" brought the apostles, who had earlier been placed in prison, before the council. The high priest asked them: "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

When Peter tells us "Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17), it is in that order. God is supreme. The commandments of a lesser ruler must be disobeyed if it is in contradiction to God's commands. Romans 13:1 tells us that: "there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:20-21: "Which he [God] wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

When Christian cake bakers, florists and photographers are commanded by the government to lend their God-given talents for the promotion of

wicked events, they must say: "We ought to obey God rather than men." When Christian organizations and businesses owned by Christians are ordered to provide abortifacients in their employee health plans, they must say: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

It is of no little matter that the Apostle Paul himself did not always passively obey those in authority. In Acts 16, when the magistrates had beaten Paul and Silas and placed them in the prison stockade, there was a great earthquake and these prisoners gave the gospel to the Philippian jailer. The jailer told them that they were free to go. But Paul replied: "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

A similar situation is recorded in Acts 22. The chief captain had ordered Paul bound and whipped. Verse 25 tells us: "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" Paul used his Roman citizenship to stop unjust punishment.

If Paul did this, we certainly cannot agree with those who say those who suffer religious persecution must suffer passively. To appeal to the law of the land, the First Amendment, is certainly a just cause for the Christian.

The Bible gives us many instances where God's children righteously refused to obey commands which violated God's Law.

In Exodus 1 and 2, we read that the Pharaoh ordered all the male infants of the Hebrews to be killed. Exodus 1:17 tells us: "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive." In Exodus 2:2 we read that when Moses was born, his mother "hid him three



months,” in disobedience to Pharaoh. We all know the account which follows of Moses in the bullrushes, and God’s providence in his rising to prominence in the house of Pharaoh.

The Hebrew children in the Book of Daniel were faced with an order to worship false gods. Daniel 3:16-18 tells us that: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar ... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

Later, in Daniel 6:7, we read that the rulers in the land urged King Darius to sign “a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.” Darius signed the decree.

When Daniel heard this, he did not retreat to his closet to pray to God in secret. Instead it says: “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Daniel 6:10). Some might say that he could have held off praying for a mere 30 days. But Daniel took to heart the words of the Psalmist: “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).

These wicked rulers saw what Daniel was doing. They told Darius that Daniel was breaking the law, and forced him, reluctantly, to throw Daniel into the lion’s den.

Even Joseph and Mary disobeyed wicked King Herod. Instead of submitting to his edict that all boys under two years of age should be killed, they took their son and fled into Egypt until such a time as the danger was past. Although Herod may have been one of the “powers that be,” which was “ordained of

God,” nonetheless, God Himself — the Supreme Power — sent His angel to tell them to disobey Herod and flee.

John Calvin writes concerning when we may disobey authority: “We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us not pay the least regard to it, nor be moved by all the dignity which they possess as magistrates — a dignity to which no injury is done when it is subordinated to the special and truly supreme power of God.”<sup>18</sup>

He continues by reminding us that the “Israelites are condemned for having too readily obeyed the impious edict of the king. For, when Jeroboam made the golden calf, they forsook the temple of God, and, in submissiveness to him, revolted to new superstitions (1 Kings 12:28).”<sup>19</sup>

Again, Calvin writes: “... But since Peter, one of heaven’s heralds, has published the edict, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29), let us console ourselves with the thought, that we are rendering the obedience which the Lord requires, when we endure anything rather than turn aside from piety. And that our courage may not fail, Paul stimulates us by the additional consideration (1 Corinthians 7:23), that we were redeemed by Christ at the great price which our redemption cost him, in order that we might not yield a slavish obedience to the depraved wishes of men, far less do homage to their impiety.”<sup>20</sup>

Commenting on Romans 13:1, Charles Hodge strikes the balance of what Paul is here teaching: “... we are to obey all that is in actual authority over us, whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust. The actual reigning emperor was to be obeyed by the Roman Christians, whatever they might think as to his title to the sceptre. But if he transcended his authority, and required them to worship idols, they were to obey God rather than man. This is the limitation to all human authority. Whenever obedience to man is incon-

sistent with obedience to God, then disobedience becomes a duty.”<sup>21</sup>

The time has come in the United States, and it has already come in many other countries, where men have had to suffer the consequences of being faithful to God, rather than destroying their consciences at the altar of the wicked commands of men. We should all seek before the Lord to be ready when we are presented with such a situation.



**Samuel Rutherford: “Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince”**

Europe had suffered all kinds of tyranny for many hundreds of years before the Protestant Reformation, with the Roman Catholic Church having strong powers over the secular rulers. The Reformation in no way minimized the importance of obeying Romans 13, but it held strongly that each individual should be free to honor God in everything which he did. The doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” taught that man was directly responsible to His Creator.

As mentioned earlier, some in Great Britain held that Romans 13 taught “the divine right of kings,” and that the subjects were bound by Scripture to obey the King in every point, since he was “ordained of God.” There was much religious and other persecution under this system, since wicked kings and queens felt at liberty to overstep their authority and put onerous burdens upon their subjects.

*Continued on page 10*

## "LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT ..."

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In 1644, the Rev. Samuel Rutherford published *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince*. He rejected strongly the concept of "the divine right of kings." He discussed Romans 13 at length and made a great divide between "the King," and "the man" who happened to be holding the title at any given time. The actual man in authority had no power of himself, but instead was subject to the law. Only when he enforced the law and did that which was according to God's Law (as the Supreme power) was his power legitimate. Any unlawful commands indicated usurped power, and thus were illegitimate.

Rutherford was a prominent Scottish Presbyterian minister, and a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, where the Westminster Confession of Faith was composed. Rutherford's bold teaching did not go without notice from the King. All copies of *Lex, Rex* were ordered burned, he was stripped of all his titles, and he was summoned to appear before Parliament on charges of treason. He entered into the presence of the Lord before the trial could begin. Some of his last words were: "Glory shines in Immanuel's Land," on which the hymn "the Sands of Time" is based.

The annals of history are littered with a long procession of very evil rulers. It is often stated that since Nero was the Roman emperor when Paul was writing to the Romans, the command to be in subjection is absolute. Nero was probably the most evil of the Roman emperors. He would engage in the most unspeakable of cruelties on a whim, including the turning of Christians into human torches to illuminate his parties. He even had his own mother killed. It would be natural to think that God certainly is not telling us to be in subjection to such a ruler! Must Christians acquiesce to unjust killings and tortures

by the authorities? Many Christians have suffered great harm, and even death, under such authorities. They often have been powerless to protect themselves, and they stood for Christ, suffering loss, to the glory of God. One needs only to read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* to see many cases where Christians gave up their lives at the hands of wicked authorities in glorious testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rutherford, in studying the Scriptures, and building on the work of such godly men as John Calvin (see first two paragraphs above under "What duty and limits does God place on earthly authority"), made a clear

**"The powers (Rom. 13:1) that be, are ordained of God, as their author and efficient; but kings commanding unjust things, and killing the innocent, in these acts, are but men, and sinful men; and the power by which they do these acts, are sinful and are usurped, and so far they are not powers ordained of God, according to his revealed will, which must rule us."**

Samuel Rutherford

distinction between submission to lawful rulings and those which were evil. Rutherford wrote: "Subjection is due to Nero as an emperor, but not any subjection is due to him in his burning of Rome, and torturing of Christians.... The law clearly distinguisheth we are to obey parents **in the Lord**, and if Nero commands idolatry, this is an excessive power. Are we obliged to obey, because the law distinguisheth not? ... The text saith we are to obey every power from God that is God's ordinance, by which the man is a minister of God for good;

but an unjust and excessive power is none of these three" (emphasis ours).<sup>22</sup>

Earlier, he stated: "The powers (Rom. 13:1) that be, are ordained of God, as their author and efficient; but kings commanding unjust things, and killing the innocent, in these acts, are but men, and sinful men; and the power by which they do these acts, are sinful and are usurped, and so far they are not powers ordained of God, according to his revealed will, which must rule us. Now the authority and official power, *in abstracto*, is ordained of God, as the text saith, and other Scriptures do evidence."<sup>23</sup>

"He that commandeth not what God commandeth, and punisheth and killeth where God, if personally and immediately present, would neither command nor punish, is not in these acts to be subjected unto, and obeyed as a superior power of the Most High."<sup>24</sup> Rutherford spoke boldly against tyranny: "... when the king doeth acts of injustice, he is neither man nor king, but some independent absolute god."<sup>25</sup> "Flying from the tyranny of abused authority, is a plain resisting of rulers in their unlawful oppression and perverting of judgment."<sup>26</sup>

Rutherford saw resistance to tyranny to not be against God, but rather against Satan. He wrote: "He that resisteth the power, that is, the official power, and the king, as king, and commanding in the Lord, resisteth the ordinance of God, and God's lawful constitution. But he who resisteth the man, who is the king, commanding that which is against God, and killing the innocent, resisteth no ordinance of God, but an ordinance of sin and Satan; for a man commanding unjustly, and ruling tyrannically, hath, in that, no power from God."<sup>27</sup>

"To obey the king's personal will, when it is sinful, ... against his legal will, is a sin, and disobedience to God...."<sup>28</sup>

### The American Revolution

Although not all of Rutherford's reasoning was accepted by American

ministers and political leaders, yet it had a very significant influence on them. Many of its elements are seen in the Declaration of Independence. Some of the Founders even proposed making the national motto: “Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God” — which sounded very much like the words of Rutherford just quoted.

Rutherford’s treatise had a great impact on the Founders, as it presented a limited constitutional government, whose only reason for existence was the good of the people, and to allow them to serve God in freedom. The King was just the established law in human form.

Man was seen as born in sin, so a government with many checks and balances was put into place. In many respects, it was fashioned on Presbyterian church government — with the people choosing representatives — “the consent of the governed.” There would be no King. Government worked from the bottom up, rather than from the top down — such as is found in Roman Catholicism and other churches with episcopal governments. It is little wonder that the War for Independence has often been called “The Presbyterian Rebellion.”

The teaching and preaching of Presbyterian ministers, as well as others — many having been trained in the teaching of Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, and so forth — had perhaps the largest impact on the decision of the colonies to declare their independence from King George III.

The Rev. John Witherspoon, Presbyterian minister and president of what is now Princeton University, preached a sermon in May 1776, shortly before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, entitled “The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men.” He concluded his message by saying: “If your cause is just, you may look with confidence to the Lord, and intreat him to plead it as his own. You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At

**“I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue.”**

John Witherspoon

this season, however, it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue. The knowledge of God and his truths have from the beginning of the world been chiefly, if not entirely confined to those parts of the earth where some degree of liberty and political justice were to be seen, and great were the difficulties with which they had to struggle, from the imperfection of human society, and the unjust decisions of usurped authority.

There is not a single instance in history, in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.”<sup>29</sup>

When future President John Adams arrived in Philadelphia to attend the Continental Congress in 1776, he visited the Pine Street [now Third] Presbyterian Church, a few blocks behind what is now called Independence Hall. The Rev. George Duffield, from Carlisle, PA, was the pastor. Adams wrote to his wife, Abigail, on May 17, 1776, one week after he had proposed that the colonies set up a government independent of the crown: “I have this morning heard Mr. Duffield, upon the signs of the times. He ran a parallel between the case of Israel and that of America; and between the conduct of Pharaoh and that of [King] George [III]. Jealousy that the Israelites would throw off the government of Egypt made him issue his edict that the midwives should cast the children into the river, and the other edict, that the men should make a large revenue of bricks without straw. He concluded, that the course of events indicated strongly the design of Providence that we should be separated from Great Britain, etc.”<sup>30</sup> Adams believed that the King, like Pharaoh, had become a tyrant in his demands on the colonies.

Indeed, Exodus 14 gives us the riveting account of the Children of Israel passing on dry ground through the Red Sea. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he and his chariots pursued after them. Many of the Israelites were afraid, and complained to Moses that they should have just stayed in Egypt, under Pharaoh’s heavy fist of tyranny over them. But in Exodus 14:15, God tells Moses not to acquiesce to the will of Pharaoh, but rather: “... speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.” In the end the Israelites passed across the sea, and the Egyptians were destroyed.

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# “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

**T**HE PRESENT TERRIBLE CONFLICT IN THE UNITED STATES is due to one thing: SIN — the breaking of the Law of God. The Bible tells us that “ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). And, that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

- Painful instances of injustice and the destruction in our streets have resulted from the breaking of all 10 of the 10 Commandments. Blasphemy against God, killing, stealing, lying, covetousness, and so forth, are everywhere seen.
- The Ten Commandments are often divided into two categories: Our relation to God (1 to 4) and our relation to each other (5-10). The Lord Jesus Christ indicated this, when he answered the question: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”
- “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).
- The Law of God shows us how terribly far we fall short of God’s glory. Only when men and women are saved by the grace and mercy of God, and live in obedience to His Word, will we ever see men living in relationship with each other as they should. The failed attempts of man’s origin have only proved time and again that they are not the answer. May those who are saved and those who are lost take this portion of Scripture to heart. —Brad Gsell

## “LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT ...”

*Continued from page 11*

In an earlier letter to Abigail, dated July 30, 1775, Adams wrote that he had heard a sermon by “Mr. Duffield, from 2 Chronicles 15:1,2. This gentleman never fails to adapt his discourse to the times. He pressed upon his audience the necessity of piety and virtue, in the present times of adversity....”<sup>31</sup> This letter reveals two things about Rev. Duffield in particular, and the ministers of the colonies in general. They did not just speak in abstract and theoretical terms. They firmly believed that the Scriptures taught “what duty God requires of man.” Thus, it was crucial that the Word of God be applied to the exact issues of the day in every generation. Some, such as Bible Presbyterian leader Carl McIntire, in the 20th century, were often strongly condemned for doing this very thing. Many ministers today fail to apply the Scriptures in their messages.

Another point to observe is that Duffield, although bold in his stand for God’s Word, nonetheless urged “piety and virtue.” Our Founders did not rush into rebellion based on heated emotions. Rather, the Declaration of Independence states that govern-

**Concerning Presbyterian minister George Duffield: “This gentleman never fails to adapt his discourse to the times. He pressed upon his audience the necessity of piety and virtue, in the present times of adversity....”**

John Adams

ments “should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable.” But, they believed that after long and sustained acts of tyranny by the King, they were duty-

bound to rebel. The Declaration then lists a number of the King’s abuses.

Appropriate quotes from the Founders would fill volumes, but again from John Adams, in a letter dated October 11, 1798, to the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts concerning the new American government: “... We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by ... morality and Religion. Avarice, Ambition ... Revenge or Gallantry [“licentiousness” in some other versions], would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”<sup>32</sup>

Some ministers today consider the American Revolution to be in violation of Romans 13. However, we might point to the Biblical account of the division of the Northern Kingdom from Judah, to see a situation of starting a new independent government with the blessing of God.

In 1 Kings 12:3-4 we read: “And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.” They attempted to be in subjection.

However, Rehoboam responded: “My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.” The account continues: “Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people” (verses 14-15).

The result: “So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only” (verses 19-20).

2 Chronicles 10:15 tells us that “the cause was of God.” The Northern Kingdom’s declaration of independence was “of God.”

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the Bible clearly teaches that God, as the Supreme Ruler, has ordained human government for the good of the people and the ordering of human society. God’s people rebel against God, and are worthy of His judgment, when they resist lawful authority.

God has instituted even ungodly governments, often as punishment to the people, even calling them “my servant” on occasion. We are to obey even unjust rulers in things which are lawful, even if inconvenient or confining. The Christian is to be clothed with humility and meekness, and must be patient, gentle and longsuffering. To be characterized with a prevailing spirit of rebellion is a sin against God.

However, if a ruler wrongly kills, imprisons, or otherwise harms inno-

**“I have this morning heard Mr. Duffield, upon the signs of the times. He ran a parallel between the case of Israel and that of America; and between the conduct of Pharaoh and that of [King] George [III]. Jealousy that the Israelites would throw off the government of Egypt made him issue his edict that the midwives should cast the children into the river, and the other edict, that the men should make a large revenue of bricks without straw. He concluded, that the course of events indicated strongly the design of Providence that we should be separated from Great Britain, etc.”**

John Adams

cent citizens, the Christian should do nothing to condone, encourage or facilitate such evil, and may need to intervene to protect the lives of themselves and others. Also, if the government orders us to do things which are against God’s Word, we must resist and refuse to do them, even if it results in unjust punishment to ourselves.

Christ told the disciples that they should expect to be delivered to the council and to be scourged in the synagogue. They would also be hailed before governors and kings for Christ’s sake. In Matthew 10:16, Christ tells them: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” May God give us wisdom in these perplexing days in which we live. •

<sup>1</sup>*Constitution of the Bible Presbyterian Church (2008), Form of Government*, Chapter XII:3:(1), p. 139; XIII:8:(1), p.143; XIV:112:(1), p. 147; *Book of Discipline*, Chapter IV:1, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Carl McIntire, *Author of Liberty* (Collingswood, NJ: Christian Beacon Press, 1946), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 870.

<sup>8</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. I, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), Chapter XX, p. 675.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1873), pp. 640-641.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 642.

<sup>11</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XIX, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) p. 481.

<sup>12</sup>McIntire, p. 112.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Hodge, pp. 641-642.

<sup>15</sup>Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XXI, Commentaries on the First Epistle to Timothy, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup>Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XIX, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 480.

<sup>17</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 667.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 675.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 675-676.

<sup>21</sup>Hodge, p. 640.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver & Boyd, 1843), p. 149.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

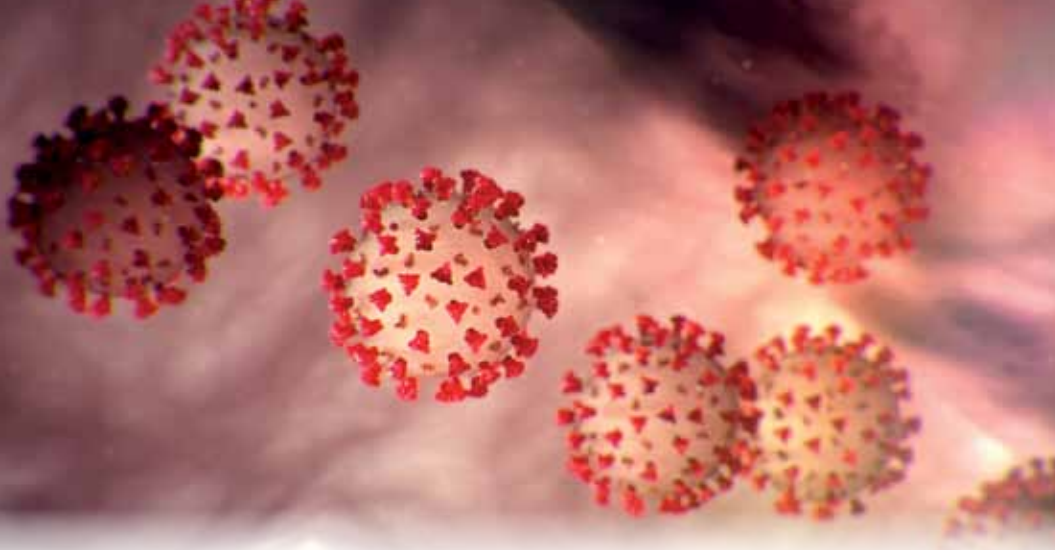
<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>29</sup>John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men* (Philadelphia, 1776), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>Ed. Charles F. Adams (grandson of John Adams), *Letters of John Adams, Addressed to His Wife*, Vol. 1, Letter 54, (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841), p. 109.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, Letter 28, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup>John Adams, with notes and illustrations by Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. IX (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1854), p. 229.



# Being “Subject” During the COVID-19 Pandemic

BY BRAD K. GSELL

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has brought on a blizzard of “public health” orders and directives both on the federal and state level. This has been quite confusing, since each state sets its own policies and they frequently change. Even Bible believing Christians have sharply disagreed as to how far we should obey the many restrictions.

We have been told that the “scientists” are to be obeyed, almost as if they were deemed infallible. Yet, from day to day, contradictory and changing “scientific facts” have been declared. Those experienced in infectious disease do not necessarily have any knowledge at all as to what is necessary for mental health, non-COVID-related diseases, the economy, and so forth. Political leaders in favor of Big Government often have been more draconian in their pronouncements, than those holding to the philosophy of “limited government.”

These orders, in general, have gone further than any directives issued in U.S. history, and have had profound effects. Many successful businesses have been hurt deeply or forced

to close. Patients with other diseases have many times had their health placed in peril, since crucial treatments have had to be delayed.

Further, there have been a number of discriminatory orders which have sent individuals and churches to court to stop the infringement of the rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights of our U.S. Constitution. Others have challenged the constitutionality of governors issuing such orders at all.

## How should the Christian respond to all of this?

Before considering all the factors, the Christian should always be ready to obey Romans 13:1: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

We should not have a rebellious spirit, and quickly resist anything we do not like. Romans 13:2 tells us that human government is an “ordinance of God,” and should be obeyed in all things lawful.

We may prefer to drive 90 miles an hour, but we should obey the 70-mile-an-hour speed limit. We may

want to have a loud event at 3:00 a.m., but the government has the right to have rules against disturbing the peace. There must be a balance between rules for public safety and orders which violate the core principles of our Constitution.

It is a bad testimony if we do not have a spirit of humility, meekness, and concern for our fellow citizens. However, the issue certainly does come up as to whether such orders are legal.

## Are these orders from governors legal?

There have been many times in U.S. history, going back to the early days of the Republic, when extraordinary circumstances have been held to warrant extraordinary restrictions on freedom. In the 1824 Supreme Court case *Gibbons v. Ogden* the majority opinion was written by Chief Justice John Marshall, and concurred with by George Washington’s nephew, Justice Bushrod Washington, among others. Marshall differentiated between what authority belonged to the Federal Government, and that which belonged to the states. He wrote that those things which are “most advantageously exercised by the States themselves” are “Inspection laws, **quarantine laws, health laws of every description**, as well as laws for regulating the internal commerce of a State, and those which respect turnpike roads, ferries, &c., are component parts of this mass” (emphasis ours).

While George Washington was president, a terrible Yellow Fever epidemic hit Philadelphia in 1793. Theologian Charles Hodge’s father died from the disease shortly after Charles was born. There were quarantines, refusals from many towns and cities to allow Philadelphians (or goods produced there) to enter, and so forth. Havre de Grace, MD, attempted to stop Philadelphians from crossing the Susquehanna River into Maryland. There have been mandated church closures during earlier epidemics and

pandemics. The 1918 Spanish flu pandemic is one example.

Some State legislatures have passed laws giving the governor the right to issue temporary orders during such health crises, not requiring legislative approval for each specific order. However, due to the unprecedented and sustained nature of the present orders there have been many legal questions raised. In fact, in North Carolina, Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest is suing Governor Roy Cooper, saying that Cooper bypassed the rules for issuing his strict orders.

### When governors discriminate

Sadly, such non-codified orders, while sometimes necessary, have been shown often to be crafted according to a governor's personal political and spiritual biases. For instance, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, whose orders were particularly strident, gave strong condemnation to citizens who protested in Lansing over her orders. However, shortly thereafter, Whitmer joined a large group of Black Lives Matter protesters, with no "social distancing" whatsoever — apparently violating her own orders!

Many states have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics to be "essential," while churches were ordered closed, or with a very low number of people allowed at one time. Walmart and Lowe's were often declared "essential," with many more times the number of people in close contact than in churches. Thankfully, our legal system continues to remedy such discrimination in many cases.

### Attorney General William Barr stands for religious liberty

Attorney General William Barr nobly put states on notice that religious discrimination would not be tolerated. Barr wrote: "... even in times of emergency, when reasonable and temporary restrictions are placed



**Governors such as Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer issued some of the strictest orders in the face of COVID-19. While she strongly condemned those protesting against her orders, and has consistently ordered social distancing, and the limiting of crowd sizes, she obviously wasn't obeying her own orders when marching with Black Lives Matter protesters. Despite excuses from her office, her own state website had "social distancing" listed as an order for any protests.**

on rights, the First Amendment and federal statutory law prohibit discrimination against religious institutions and religious believers. Thus, government may not impose special restrictions on religious activity that do not also apply to similar nonreligious activity. For example, if a government allows movie theaters, restaurants, concert halls, and other comparable places of assembly to remain open and unrestricted, it may not order houses of worship to close, limit their congregation size, or otherwise impede religious gatherings. Religious institutions must not be singled out for special burdens."

Barr concluded his statement: "The United States Department of Justice will continue to ensure that religious freedom remains protected if any state or local government, in their response to COVID-19, singles out, targets, or discriminates against any house of worship for special restrictions."

### A few examples of religious discrimination

**KANSAS:** U.S. District Court of Kansas Judge John Broomes ruled against the State in a religious dis-

crimination suite: "Plaintiffs have made a sufficient showing that a live controversy exists as to whether the Governor's current restrictions on religious activity ... violate Plaintiffs' First Amendment right to freely exercise their religion.... Defendant has not argued that mass gatherings at churches pose unique health risks that do not arise in mass gatherings at airports, offices, and production facilities. Yet the exemption for religious activities has been eliminated while it remains for a multitude of activities that appear comparable in terms of health risks."<sup>1</sup>

**KENTUCKY:** An order signed by Circuit Judges David McKeague, John Nalbandian and Jeffrey Sutton remedied a case of religious discrimination. The order pointed out that "The Governor has offered no good reason for refusing to trust the congregants who promise to use care in worship in just the same way it trusts accountants, lawyers, and laundromat workers to do the same." It also pointed out that the Governor himself had meetings of eight to 12 people in his own office!<sup>2</sup>

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## BEING "SUBJECT" DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**MISSISSIPPI:** The discrimination against a church and its members in Greenville, MS, was so egregious that the U.S. Justice Department stepped in. Attorney General William Barr wrote: "Today, the Department filed a Statement of Interest in support of a church in Mississippi that allegedly sought to hold parking lot worship services, in which congregants listened to their pastor preach over their car radios, while sitting in their cars in the church parking lot with their windows rolled up. The City of Greenville fined congregants \$500 per person for attending these parking lot services — while permitting citizens to attend nearby drive-in restaurants, even with their windows open. The City appears to have thereby singled churches out as the only essential service (as designated by the state of Mississippi) that may not operate despite following all CDC and state recommendations regarding social distancing."

**NORTH CAROLINA:** Judge James C. Dever III ruled on a similar case in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Eastern Division. Dever wrote: "Saturday's order pointed out that while only up to 10 people are allowed inside for religious services under Cooper's stay-at-home order, that same standard doesn't apply to other entities, such as businesses that are limited to 50% capacity, and funeral services, which allow up to 50 people. The record ... reveals that the Governor appears to trust citizens to perform non-religious activities indoors (such as shopping or working or selling merchandise) but does not trust them to do the same when they worship together indoors."<sup>3</sup>

**NEW YORK:** U.S. District Judge Gary Sharpe ruled against discriminatory orders by New York Governor

Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. After banning protests, they shortly thereafter commended the Black Lives Matter protests, and urged people to protest. Sharpe declared: "But by acting as they did, Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio sent a clear message that mass protests are deserving of preferential treatment" (over church services).

Sharp continued: "It is not the judiciary's role to second guess the likes of Governor Cuomo or Mayor de Blasio when it comes to decisions

**We should not have a rebellious spirit, and quickly resist anything we do not like. Romans 13:2 tells us that human government is an "ordinance of God," and should be obeyed in all things lawful.**

they make in such troubling times, that is, until those decisions result in the curtailment of fundamental rights without compelling justification."

The New York officials also arbitrarily allowed graduation ceremonies. Sharp wrote: "There is nothing materially different about a graduation ceremony and a religious gathering such that defendants' justifications for a difference in treatment can be found compelling."<sup>4</sup>

### **Government by the "Consent of the Governed"**

Our Declaration of Independence declares that all governments "deriv[e] their just powers from the consent of the governed." The United States is a Constitutional Republic, under God, with representatives chosen by the citizens. Therefore, it is our right and duty to be active in letting our representatives know what we think. If Christians sit back and do nothing,

that opens the field for "iniquity to abound." Being an active citizen is NOT "resisting" the government, since those in power are only there by the will of the people. They have no inherent right to power within themselves.

With people's businesses and livelihoods being destroyed, we should be actively engaged. With churches being forced to abandon the in-person "assembling of yourselves together" for extended periods of time, we should let our officials know that we have a great respect for protecting public health and are ready to cooperate, yet religious discrimination is not acceptable. It is not within their power to arbitrarily consider church services to be less "essential" than other secular activities. As bigger and bigger government is being promoted and implemented, we as citizens should stand respectfully, but strongly, against it in favor of liberty.

### **Conclusion**

As Christians we should be good citizens. We should seek to follow all temporary legal orders, even if we find some of them burdensome. Even if not for ourselves, we should consider others in following "social distancing," "mask" directives, and so forth. Romans 12:18 tells us: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." •

<sup>1</sup>Michael Stivola, *Wichita Eagle*, April 18, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Wolfson, *Louisville Courier Journal*, May 9, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Bridges, *Raleigh News and Observer*, May 17, 2020/17/20.

<sup>4</sup>Ryan Tarinelli, *New York Law Journal*, June 26, 2020.



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