

AUTHORITY: GOD'S HAND THROUGH GOVERNMENT-Part Two
Romans 13:1-7

"Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. ² So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. ⁴ For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. ⁵ Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath, but also because of your conscience. ⁶ And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's public servants, continually attending to these tasks. ⁷ Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor."

INTRODUCTION

On Friday June 9, President Donald Trump held up several massive binders and dropped them to the floor to demonstrate the "slow, costly and time-consuming" permitting rules that have prevented the United States from moving more quickly to build infrastructure projects around the country. Speaking at the Department of Transportation, President Trump said he'd just met with people responsible for their states' economic development and roadways, including a man who showed the President a massive binder containing a costly environmental report that held up road construction. It concerned an 18-mile road. To comply with current permit regulations, as Trump pointed out, the State of Maryland, "spent \$29 million for an environmental report weighing 70 pounds and costing \$24,000 per page." Trump's speech closed out the White House's "infrastructure week" meant to highlight the need to speed up the permitting process before roads, bridges, ports and tracks across the country can be built. As President Trump reported, "It took only four years to build the Golden Gate Bridge and five years to build the Hoover Dam and less than one year to build the Empire State building, . . . but today it can take 10 years just to get the approvals and permits needed to build a major infrastructure project. . . . We have structurally deficient bridges, clogged roads, crumbling dams and rocks, our rivers are in trouble, our railways are aging, and chronic traffic that slows commerce and diminishes our citizens quality of life. Other than that, we are doing very well."

How many of you think the greatest danger to the citizens of this nation is a *lack* of regulations generated by our state and Federal governments? In the name of "protecting us and our environment," bureaucrats that we elected or were appointed to protect our God-given rights or to serve our best interests have assumed the authority to redefine our rights and our best interests at their will. This is often exasperating!

"In the beginning," **Genesis 1:1** tells us, "God created the heavens and the earth." What is not reported is that God quickly faced a class action lawsuit for His failure to file an environmental impact study. God was granted a temporary permit for the project, but He was stymied by the "cease and desist" order for the earthly part. Then God simply said, "Let there be light!" (**Genesis 1:3**). Immediately, officials demanded to know how the light would be made. Would there be strip mining? What about thermal pollution? God explained the light would come from a large ball of fire. He was granted provisional permission to make light, assuming no smoke would result from the ball of fire. He would need to obtain a building permit, and, to conserve energy, He must have the light out half the time. God agreed. He offered to call the light "Day" and the darkness "Night" (**Genesis 1:5**). The officials replied they were not interested in semantics. "Then God said, 'Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds'" (**Genesis 1:11**). The EPA agreed to this, so long as only native seed was used. "Then God said, 'Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth'" (**Genesis 1:20**). Officials pointed out that this would require approval from the Department of Game and Fish, coordinated with the Heavenly Wildlife Federation and Audubon Society. Everything was

okay until God said the project would be completed in six days. The officials said it would take at least two hundred days to review the applications and the impact study. After that there would be a public hearing. Then there would be ten to twelve months before . . . At this point, God created Hell.

Last week's sermon focused upon the question, When Is It Godly to Obey Government? A review of conditions in the 1st century A.D. found about 10% of the Roman Empire's estimated 50-60 million people were slaves, including many Christians, with no more rights than their master's cattle. Only about 10% enjoyed the rights of full citizenship when the Apostle Paul wrote his letter in A.D. 57 to the Church at Rome, where 35-40% of the population were slaves performing most of the work for their conquerors. All governing officials outside of Italy were appointed from the capital of Rome, could never be voted out of office, the tax rate could be increased at will by their Roman masters, and provincial governors held nearly absolute power over their province. Yet, there is not one line in the New Testament encouraging the violent overthrow of the Roman Empire. Instead, **Romans 13:1-7** promotes peaceful, respectful cooperation.

Does this mean God approves governments claiming as much authority over us as they please? No. As Thomas Jefferson proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men." When governments become oppressors of "unalienable," God-given "Rights" that none can lawfully alter or deny, God authorizes five peaceful tools to change them: *Purification* (conversion, changing society by cleaning up people from within, "by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" when they give themselves to Christ, **Titus 3:3-5**, ESV); *Precedent* (example demonstrated by Christ's followers); *Petition*; *Participation* (in politics); and *Prayer*. It's when government seeks to deny either of our two most unalienable rights—freedom to exercise our religious beliefs according to our conscience and freedom to live—that we are justified in taking up arms against a government. Even then, it is only after every other recourse has been exhausted. This brings us to our second Outline Point:

II. WHEN IS IT GODLY TO DISOBEY GOVERNMENT?

The early days of the Church in Jerusalem provide an example of when it is godly to disobey government. A man "lame from birth" and begging outside the Temple received a dramatic healing when Peter, accompanied by John, declared to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" The commotion this stirred among onlookers gave Peter opportunity to proclaim the good news of salvation through Christ alone. This highly incensed the religious leaders who'd had Jesus crucified, so they had Peter and John arrested (**Acts 3:1-24; 4:1-3**). We pick up the action in **Acts 4:5-6, 13-20**: "The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. ¹³ When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in response. ¹⁵ After they had ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, 'What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign, evident to all who live in Jerusalem, has been done through them, and we cannot deny it! ¹⁷ However, so this does not spread any further among the people, let's threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again.' ¹⁸ So they called for them and ordered them not to preach or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰ for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard'" (italics added). When the "apostles" were later arrested for violating their gag order, "not to preach or teach at all in the name of Jesus," **Acts 5:27-29** records what happened: "After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, ²⁸ 'Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man's blood on us!' ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"

This incident gives Christ's followers a precedent for today: We have a God-ordained duty to disobey government when commanded to do things contrary to God's will. This is exactly the situation faced at the founding of the United States of America. Most revolutions are led by society's "have nots" to gain more of what the "haves" enjoy. But leaders of our American Revolution were already prospering under British Rule. They had the most to lose. They dared to challenge the greatest military power of their day because they were driven by commitments to God's principles; not from desires of greed or personal gain.

John Adams, who became our new nation's first Vice President and then our second President, reports a religious renewal preceded and made possible our political Revolution. Our nation's true "Revolution," he observed, "was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations." Adams was describing the first truly national event in American history, a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Its main wave swept through the colonies from 1739-42 and affected every stratum of society from New England to Georgia. Dead formalism in churches gave way to fervor unleashed by hundreds of thousands of fresh converts seeking deliverance from sin and submission to God in all areas of their personal lives and throughout their civil society. Despite the difficulties of travel in those days, recent studies reveal more than 3/4ths of the free population in the colonies were in church on a typical Sunday in 1775!

The Great Awakening continued to revive America's Biblical vitality into the 1770s. This placed God's sanction upon separation from Britain as a legitimate recourse to spiritual corruptions forced upon the colonies by the Crown. Previously, most colonists viewed themselves as British subjects with more in common with their homeland than with other colonies. They now began to view themselves as Americans sharing the urgency to create a society free to honor God. England, as much of Europe in the 18th century, reeked as a moral cesspool. Our citizens were in revolt to England's moral decadence; not just its political and religious tyranny. In 1773, a Crown-appointed governor wrote to England's Board of Trade, "If you ask an American, who is his master? he will tell you he has none, nor any governor, but Jesus Christ."

Looming over the Revolutionary generation was the spectral fear of England's desire to impose an Anglican Establishment upon all American colonies. John Adams said this did as much as anything to stir citizens to question "the constitutional authority of Parliament over the colonies." By taxing the American colonies to support British world ventures, without allowing them representation in Parliament, England violated the Magna Charta of 1215 that guaranteed basic rights of all subjects of the Crown. Adams wrote, "If Parliament could tax us, they could establish the Church of England, with all its creeds, articles, tests, ceremonies, and tithes, and prohibit all other churches." For more than a year (1768-69), the *New-York Gazette* denounced Britain's attempt to impose an "ecclesiastical bondage" upon our citizens worse than its taxation, because taxes "affect not the right of conscience." Other colonial newspapers echoed similar dire warnings. Thus, years before the cry of 1775, "the British are coming," colonists were already rallying at the alarm, "the Bishops are coming." They were convinced their most cherished liberty, freedom to worship God without interference of the British Government, hung in the balance.

Yet, our Founding Fathers did not take up arms lightly, even after British troops occupied Boston in 1768 and closed this vital colonial trade port, in retaliation for resistance to recent Acts of Parliament. Decrees went out for Christians to humble themselves before God over sins that may have stirred England's hostility against them as His judgment. Petitions were repeatedly drawn up and every diplomatic means employed to bring about a peaceful settlement of their differences with England. Not until British troops fired upon Minutemen upon the greens of Lexington and Concord, in April, 1775, killing 49 and wounding 39 others, did the cry for armed revolt gain momentum among the colonists. Our Continental Congress still sued for peace, dispatching the Olive Branch Petition to England in July, 1775. But when news came to Congress that King George III had rejected this Petition and ordered an additional 20,000 troops to our shores instead, to force compliance with the King's demands, armed conflict became necessary to preserve

the religious and political freedoms our citizens could claim as God-given rights. Patrick Henry's stirring words of March 23, 1775, delivered to galvanize Virginia to defend the inalienable rights of its citizens by any means necessary, finally became the heart cry of most leaders and patriots of the American colonies, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

CONCLUSION

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress of our fledgling nation adopted a resolution stating, "the flag of the United States be thirteen alternate stripes red and white" and "the Union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation." Efforts by public schools in the 1880s to celebrate the anniversary of the adoption of the Stars & Stripes as our nation's flag gained such momentum by 1916 that President Woodrow established the national observance of Flag Day by Presidential Proclamation. In 1949, President Harry Truman signed an Act of Congress designating June 14 as National Flag Day.

Baxter Black of New Mexico, now age 72, is an American cowboy, poet, philosopher, and former large-animal veterinarian. More recently, he's become a radio and television commentator. We close today's sermon by reading his poem, *I Give You the Flag*:

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the flag / That flew over valley forge / Was torn in two by the gray and blue / And bled through two world wars.

I give you the flag that burned in the street / In protest, in anger and shame, / The very same flag that covered the men / Who died defending her name.

We now stand together, Americans all, / Either by choice or by birth / To honor the flag that's flown on the moon / And changed the face of the earth.

History will show this flag stood a friend / To the hungry, the homeless and lost / That a mixture of men as common as clay / Valued one thing beyond cost.

And they've signed in blood from Bunker Hill / to Saigon, Kuwait, Bosnia / Kabul, Baghdad, and Toko-Ri. / I give you the flag that says to the world / Each man has a right to be free.