

# Can one who hates justice govern?

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**Psa 125:3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.**

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“A tyrannical law, since it is not in accordance with reason, is not a law in the strict sense, but rather a perversion of law.”

– St. Thomas Aquinas

“Without justice, what are kingdoms but great robber bands? What are robber bands but small kingdoms?”

– St. Augustine

“I can no longer stand idly by and merely watch my ungracious lords and angry princes. I must resist them, even if it is only with words.”

– Martin Luther

“To say Kings are accountable to none but God, is the overturning of all law and government. For if they may refuse to give account, then all covenants made with them at Coronation; all Oaths are in vain, and mere mockeries, all Laws which they swear to keep, made to no purpose.”

– John Milton

Every Fourth of July Americans celebrate Independence Day, the day the Continental Congress signed a document formally severing the political ties between King George III and the Colonies. For many American Christians, who believe that obedience to civil government is one of the laws of Christ, this celebration usually creates an interesting internal dilemma. To celebrate Independence Day, which commemorates the American people's rebellion against their government, is to tacitly condone their rebellion against British government. To purposely refrain from the celebration in protest to the American Revolutionary War, however, is to actively condemn the American government as the fruit of a poisonous tree. In an attempt to resolve this dilemma- this paper aims to show that obedience to unjust government is not a biblical mandate. First, it will debunk two common false teachings regarding the relationship between believers and civil government. Then it will further analyze the Biblical teaching on authority and government with the assistance of both Scripture and Church fathers. It will make it clear, as early American Baptist Minister John Leland famously stated, "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."<sup>1</sup>

The most blatant false doctrine is the divine right of government is best explained by King James I of England- the king who "authorized" the King James Version of the Bible. On March 21, 1609, King James declared to Parliament that kings (and by extension governments) can "make and unmake their subjects... [they are] judges over all their subjects, and in all causes, and yet accountable to none but God only."<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, this theory has also been recently promoted by the American Government. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Department of Homeland Security established "Clergy Response Teams" to quell civil unrest. These teams were composed of local clergy members like Dr. Durrell Tuberville, then chaplain of the Shreveport Fire Department and the Caddo Sherriff Office, who explained that citizens must obey the government, "because the government's established by the Lord, you know.

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<sup>1</sup>Dreisbach, Daniel L. *Mr. Jefferson, a Mammoth Cheese, and the "Wall of Separation between Church and Sstate": A Bicentennial Commemoration.* *Journal of Church and State* Aut 2001: 725-745

<sup>2</sup>Cobin, John M. *The Bible and Government* Alertness Books 2003: 117

And, that's what we believe in the Christian faith. That's what's stated in the scripture."<sup>3</sup> While Tuberville and King James do not provide any room for disobeying the government, there is a place for disobeying the government. For instance, it is abundantly clear that whenever governments command Christians to perform an action that violates God's law, in the words of the Apostles John and Peter, "We must obey God rather than men."<sup>4</sup> So the false teaching of absolute obedience to government is ridiculous and is only held by new or nominal Christians.

The other errant belief is more sophisticated, more prevalent, and therefore more dangerous. This theory holds that it is only permissible to disobey governments when they command Christians to disobey God. Bruce Dickinson for instance, argues that though Christians cannot "[refuse] to obey a law as an act of protest against a government policy," Christians "must disobey the government when it commands us to do something contrary to God's Word."<sup>5</sup> This theory is able to account for the Apostles John and Peter disobeying the edict that would stop them from preaching, and most other examples of disobedience that are presented positively in Scripture. It cannot however account for all examples of condoned resistance to governments in Scripture, and is further revealed to be false according to the rubric for judging false teachings given by Jesus.

The theory that Christians can only disobey a law when it conflicts with an explicit Biblical command is seen to be false by the conduct of the Prophet Elijah dealing with King Ahab. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel murdered Naboth- a farmer who would not sell his land- in order to claim possession of it. After this crime committed by the King, God sends Elijah to rebuke Ahab. Now here is the clincher, though God does tell Elijah that Ahab is in Naboth's vineyard and though God tells Elijah to meet Ahab- there is no explicit command to enter Ahab's property.<sup>6</sup> I Elijah could have camped outside Ahab's land and waited patiently for an opportunity to meet Ahab. Nevertheless Elijah enters the King's land, and as revealed by Ahab's

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<sup>3</sup> Ferrel, Jeff. *Homeland Security Enlists Clergy to Quell Public Unrest if Martial Law Ever Declared*. [KLSA-12.com](http://www.ksla.com/Global/story.asp?S=6937987) Accessed on August 15, 2009 from: <http://www.ksla.com/Global/story.asp?S=6937987>

<sup>4</sup> Acts 5:29 ESV

<sup>5</sup> Davidson, Bruce. "Is Civil Disobedience Biblical?" [Searching Together](#) Winter 1991.

<sup>6</sup> It could be argued that Ahab did not have legitimate ownership claims over the land because of the manner in which he seized the land, and after all God still calls the land "the vineyard of Naboth" (1King 21:18.) That is however, irrelevant for the discussion since legally Ahab owned the land as revealed by Elijah's rebuke "Have you killed and also taken possession?" (1 Kings 21:19.)

less than cordial greeting: “Have you found me, O my enemy?” – Elijah was trespassing.<sup>7</sup> Elijah’s trespassing was not sinful, wrong, or misguided. There are also many more examples of condoned resistance to governments (e.g. Egyptian Midwives v. Pharaoh (Exodus 2), Ehud v. King Eglon (Judges 3), Rahab v. King of Jericho (Joshua 2) et al.) Therefore, the theory that believers may only disobey government laws when these laws conflict with God’s laws cannot explain the justified actions of Elijah.

Furthermore this theory is false as revealed by its fruits. The principle of judging teaching by its results is given in the sermon on mount. There Jesus warns the assembly to:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."<sup>8</sup>

The theory that Christians may only disobey governmental edicts when they compel Christians to violate God’s laws has also had devastating effects for the Church’s reputation and the welfare of millions. So when examining the fruits of the theory that states: “Christians can only disobey the state when it commands them to disobey God,” it becomes apparent that the theory is just as dangerous as ravenous wolves.

The fruits of this theory are most clearly seen in Hitler’s Germany. According to a Census taken in 1925, out of a population of 65 million, 40 million Germans were Lutheran, 21 million were Catholic, and another 620,000 Germans belonged to smaller protestant denominations.<sup>9</sup> In this self-identifying Christian nation, Hitler’s government was able to brutally murder over 6 million innocents. While the absence of Christian resistance to the Third Reich, can in part be explained by the heretical “Reich Church” which “sought to synthesize Nazi ideology and

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<sup>7</sup> 1Kings 21:20 ESV see above foot-note if you believe that Ahab did not legitimately own the Vineyard.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:-15-20 ESV

<sup>9</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *GERMAN CHURCHES AND THE NAZI STATE*. Last updated May 4, 2009, Accessed August 15, 2009: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005206>

Protestant tradition.”<sup>10</sup> Since this movement only “gained 600,000 adherents,” it is inaccurate to attribute Christian compliance to this movement alone.<sup>11</sup> Rather, as seen by both Protestant and Catholic “attempts to retain control of their respective institutions and the rights of their brethren to worship freely and openly,” most German Christians believed that the State had no right to interfere with worship, and were ready to resist when the Reich attempted to co-opt this worship.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, many German Christians were able to rationalize their complacency in other matters because they were not commanded to participate in the atrocities-only to stand idly by as their government murdered millions. This wide-spread failure to act has haunted the Church’s reputation, and even worse- it helped Hitler murder millions. Thus the theory that Christians may only disobey the State when it commands them to disobey an explicit command of God is revealed to be false by its fruits.

A few Christian theologians, such as Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, totally rejected the authority of the Third Reich. In 1934, as a response to Hitler’s “Reich Church” Niemöller, Bonhoeffer and a small group of Christian clergymen founded the Confessing Church.<sup>13</sup> At the Confessing Church’s first meeting it issued the Barmen Declaration which affirmed that “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”<sup>14</sup> Isolated from the historical context this statement seems like standard Christian doctrine, but within its context this declaration rejected the Third Reich’s claims of authority. In a more apparent rejection of Hitler’s authority, Niemöller published a book of sermons titled “*Christus ist Mein Führer*.”<sup>15</sup> While the straight English literally reads “Christ is my leader,” because of this book Niemöller was imprisoned for seven years in Dachau concentration camp.<sup>16</sup> Since nearly everyone in Germany called Hitler “the Führer,” as Robert Brown notes, to say: “Christ is my

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *GERMAN CHURCHES AND THE NAZI STATE*. Last updated May 4, 2009, Accessed August 15, 2009 <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005206>

<sup>14</sup> Brown, Robert McAfee. *1984: Orwell and Barmen* Christian Century August 15-22, 1984, p. 770. Accessed on August 15, 2009 from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1415>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Führer” was also to say “Hitler is *not* my Führer.”<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly rejected Hitler’s authority in a radio address given only two days after Hitler became Chancellor. Bonhoeffer warned that Germany could be following an idolatrous cult lead by a “*Verführer* (a mis-leader) and one who mocks God himself. [Bonhoeffer] was cut off the air at that juncture.”<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer went on to join the Nazi-resistance movement, and because of his involvement with a plan to assassinate Hitler, “on April 9, 1945, two years and four days after his arrest, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged.”<sup>19</sup> In contrast with the false teachers in many German Churches, Bonhoeffer and Niemöller suffered for doing good; they suffered with Christ in their attempts to resist Nazi brutality and their work to expose Hitler as a “*Verführer*.” This paper seeks to explain that Niemöller’s and Bonhoeffer’s rejection of Hitler’s authority and their subsequent resistance to his government was in accordance with God’s will. Indeed this paper aims to show that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.

### Romans 13:1-7

This examination of the Biblical doctrine of government will focus on Romans 13:1-7. While 1 Peter 2:12-18 and Titus 3:1 are important, they are discussed more thoroughly after the conclusion of the paper- in the section devoted to objections. This paper focuses on Romans 13:1-7, because it is the section of the Bible that is most often misrepresented in order to support the misguided theory of the divine right of governments.<sup>20</sup> Also, it is often genuinely misunderstood, for the Chapter begins with the Apostle writing:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, F. Burton. Kelly, Geoffrey B. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Harper Collins 1995. P.14

<sup>19</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* Prince Peabody Mass. 2008. p.367

<sup>20</sup> For further elaboration on how Rom. 13 has been used to hinder Christian opposition to tyranny, cf. N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995)3-24.

resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”<sup>21</sup>

In the words of T.L. Carter, “in the opening verses of Rom. 13 Paul offers what at first sight appears to be an uncompromising endorsement of political authority.”<sup>22</sup> A more rigorous reading of the text reveals a more nuanced view of political powers.

The first question that one should ask when reading the text is: who are these “governing authorities”? Some scholars, most notably Oscar Cullmann, believe that Paul is referring to some sort of angelic power. Cullmann’s claim rests on the observation that the same Greek word translated as “authorities” is used in Ephesians 6:12 to describe demons. Most scholars, however, conclude that Paul is referencing some sort of political power due to the description of these “authorities” given in Romans 13:1-7. These scholars’ reasoning is more convincing, because an author’s meaning is determined not only by the words used, but the context in which the words are used.

A perfect example of this interpreting technique can be seen in Paul’s second epistle to Timothy. Paul congratulates Timothy for his familiarity with Holy Scripture, and then affirms that “all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”<sup>23</sup> While every English version of the Bible (that I have seen) translates “γραφή” as “scripture,” “γραφή” literally means “document.”<sup>24</sup> Paul was certainly using the term “document” in reference to Biblical writings, so using 2 Timothy 3:16 to claim that all documents are inspired by God would be absurd. The description of the term “document” provided in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 is necessary to determine what Paul intends.

Therefore in order to truly understand who Paul means when he writes “governing authorities” in Romans 13:1, one only needs to further read Romans 13:

“For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on

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<sup>21</sup> Rom. 13:1-2 ESV

<sup>22</sup> Carter, T.L. *The Irony of Romans 13*, *Novum Testamentum* XLVI, 3 2004, 209

<sup>23</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 ESV

<sup>24</sup> Strong’s Greek Dictionary reference G1124



the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."<sup>25</sup>

After reading these verses we can disregard Cullmann's contention that Paul is talking about celestial authorities, for Paul states that Christians should pay taxes to the authorities, and taxes are only levied by states-never by angels. As indicated by the imperative to pay taxes to these "authorities," Paul is describing a form of civil government.

That Paul is referencing a sort of political power is also established when he writes that the governing authorities, "bear the sword."<sup>26</sup> This is the trademark of all governments: they all claim a territorial monopoly on the use of force. The government alone has the legal power to present landowners with the "fair market value" of their land, and then seize it! The government is the only organization that has the legal power to establish jails to hold those who break its laws! As the Austrian economist Ludwig Von Mises astutely observed government is "the social apparatus of compulsion and coercion."<sup>27</sup> In fact all laws require the use of force, or at the very least the threat of force (which in turn requires the capability to use force for these threats to be effective). Governments do not suggest that their citizens obey their laws, they pay policemen to ensure that laws are obeyed. Government and violence are so closely linked that Martin Luther uses "The Sword" as an alternate name for government throughout his essay *On Secular Authority: how far does the Obedience owed it extend*.<sup>28</sup> Therefore when Paul writes that the governing authorities bear the sword, it is clear that he is writing about a civil government.

This is further shown by the previous chapter in the epistle to the Romans. From Romans 12:15-21, it would be easy to (mistakenly) believe that there should be no government to punish criminals. The Apostle commands believers to "bless those who persecute [them]", to

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 13:3-7 ESV

<sup>26</sup> Romans 13:4 ESV

<sup>27</sup> Mises, Ludwig von. Human Action Mises Institute, Auburn 2008 71

<sup>28</sup> Luther, Martin. *On Secular Authority: How far does the Obedience owed it extend?* Quoted from Windows on the World Gary Scott Smith and P.C. Kemeny Editors, Copley Custom Publishing. Acton, Mass. 2004. P114.

“never avenge [themselves],” and to “overcome evil with good.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, according to Matthew Henry “lest it should seem as if [these commands] did cancel the ordinance of a civil magistracy among Christians,” Paul quickly, “[asserts] the necessity of it, and of the due infliction of punishment upon evil doers, however it may look like recompensing evil for evil.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, in Romans 13:1-6, the terms “governing authorities,” “rulers,” and “authorities,” are alternate names for a specific sort of political power.

It is also clear that not all governments are “governing authorities” in the manner which Paul uses the term. For Paul strongly states that, “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”<sup>31</sup> Paul was aware though, that not all governments were instituted by God. As a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” and a one-time Pharisee, Paul was intimately familiar with the Old Testament, including the book of Hosea.<sup>32</sup> In this God breathed document, Hosea is prophesying about the coming destruction of Israel due to its corruption and one of the sins listed is that Israel “made Kings, but not through [God]. They set up princes, but [God] knew it not.”<sup>33</sup> This passage is not implying that God was unaware of their actions, but rather as Matthew Henry observes the Israelites created these kings “in contempt of [God],” and without “regard of his providence.”<sup>34</sup> That is, while God allowed the Israelites to create their kings, He certainly did not institute them. Therefore not all governments are “governing authorities” in the sense of Romans 13.

#### Romans 13:3-4 and 1Peter 2:14 Establish the Aim of Just Government

Rather Paul, as revealed by the description of the “governing authorities” given in Romans 13:1-7, is writing about believer’s duty to just government. Indeed while Paul tells Christians to obey authorities, he expounds what authority governments truly have. As John Milton, in his 1650 essay *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, writes, “[lest] we should be [deceived], [the

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<sup>29</sup> Romans 12: 14-21 ESV

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Henry’s Commentary on 13:1-6

<sup>31</sup> Romans 13:1 ESV

<sup>32</sup> Philippians 3:5 ESV

<sup>33</sup> Hos 8:4 ESV

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Hosea 8:1-7

Apostles Peter and Paul] describe exactly” what powers belong to civil government.<sup>35</sup> In Romans 13 for instance, Paul describes a just civil state as “the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.”<sup>36</sup> Peter writes that governors are “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”<sup>37</sup> Given these descriptions Martin Luther writes, “how the secular Sword and law are to be employed according to God’s will is thus clear and certain enough: to punish the wicked and protect the just.”<sup>38</sup> Governments that attempt to use the law beyond this purpose, therefore do so against God’s will. So, as Gene Edward Vieth, observes that “a ruler who protects wrongdoers and punishes the innocent has no calling- and thus no authority.”<sup>39</sup> Governments’ authority to use force is limited by Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 to punishing wrongdoers and protecting innocents.

Peter and Paul, however, do not mean that whenever a person does something wrong or evil that they ought to be punished by government force. In order to comprehend exactly what the Apostles intended, one must examine the actual Greek text rather than English translations. The term “wrongdoer” is an English translation for those who “Πράσσω κακός,” that is, as Strong’s Greek Dictionary reveals, those who “practice” acts with“(objectively) injurious” effects.<sup>40</sup> A related word “κακοποιός” meaning “malefactor” or performers of objectively injurious crimes, is used in 1Peter 2:14, to describe those who are justly punished by government.<sup>41</sup> The selection of these Greek words by the Apostles lead Isaac Backus, the preeminent Baptist advocate for disestablishment of religion in America, to proclaim that “the crimes which fall within the magistrate’s jurisdiction to punish, are only such as work ill to our

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<sup>35</sup> Milton, John. *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* p.7

<sup>36</sup> Romans 13:4 ESV

<sup>37</sup> 1Peter 2:14 ESV

<sup>38</sup> Luther, Martin. *On Secular Authority: How far does the Obedience owed it extend?* Quoted from Windows on the World Gary Scott Smith and P.C. Kemeny Editors, Copley Custom Publishing. Acton, Mass. 2004. P115.

<sup>39</sup> Vieth, Gene Edward. *Authority in Vocation*

<sup>40</sup> Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary reference: **G2556**. Throughout Romans 13:1-4 κ α κ ός is the Greek word used to describe the behavior that the “governing authorities” are to punish. Κ α κ ός is the primary word that is the base of the verbs κ α κ όω “to injure” and κ α κ ο υ χ έω “to maltreat or “to torment.”

<sup>41</sup> Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary reference: **G2557**.

neighbor.”<sup>42</sup> Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:14 limit the use of violent government force to the punishment of violent crimes

Indeed the violent nature of human law shows that not all things ought to be legislated- government violence is only justified in response to aggressive criminal violence. This truth, though discernable through mere reason applied to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, is found elsewhere in Scripture. In Acts 18, Luke recounts one of Paul’s interactions with a just governor. After spending eighteen months preaching the Good News to the Corinthians, a group of Jews brought Paul to Gallio the Roman proconsul of Achaia and accused him of “persuading people to worship God contrary to the [Jewish law].”<sup>43</sup> Before Paul could defend himself, Gallio dismissed the case saying, “if it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint.”<sup>44</sup> Gallio, a truly admirable governor, understood that legal punishment, a form of violence, is not a tool suited for settling theological disputes.<sup>45</sup> Government violence can properly be used, but only to deter aggression.

If governments use the strong- arm of the law beyond the limitations that God ordained, then they are tyrannies. Tyrannies and tyrants are not God’s ministers nor are they ordained by God, as King David rhetorically asks in Psalm 94, “can wicked rulers be allied with [God], those who frame injustice by statute?”<sup>46</sup> Indeed rulers who do not rule with justice, do not rule by God, this principle is seen quite easily in Acts 12. At the beginning of this chapter Luke writes that “Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church,” James the brother of John is murdered, and Peter is wrongly arrested.<sup>47</sup> Herod intends to punish Peter after Passover, but God has other plans. The night before Herod was to kill Peter, Peter’s sleep was disturbed by an angel of the Lord. The angel leads Peter out of prison and then leaves

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<sup>42</sup> Backus, Isaac. " 11: Isaac Backus, AN APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY - Political Sermons of the American Founding Era. Vol. 1 (1730-1788)." *Online Library of Liberty*. 1773. [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=816&chapter=69242&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=816&chapter=69242&layout=html&Itemid=27) (accessed March 2, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Acts 18:13 ESV

<sup>44</sup> Act 18:14 ESV. The King James Version poorly translates “π ο ν η ρ ός ρ ᾿αδιούργημα” as wicked lewdness, when (as the ESV reads) the most direct translation is “hurtful crime,” or in more vibrant English “vicious crime.”

<sup>45</sup> Indeed from the context of Acts 18, Gallio seems to be sent as a minister of God (like the ideal governing authorities described in Romans 13) to protect Paul from the blood-thirsty mob.

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 94:20 ESV David proceeds to answer his own question by writing that God will destroy wicked rulers.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 12:1 ESV

him, and Peter who had been half asleep, realizes that “Lord has sent his angel and rescued [him] from the hand of Herod.”<sup>48</sup> God sends his angels to thwart the plans of tyrants, so they cannot be allied with Him. As Jesus said in response to those who claimed that He drove out demons with demonic power, “if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”<sup>49</sup> Satan does not cast out his demons, and neither does God send angels to hamper his ministers. Tyrants that seek to murder members of the church are not ordained by God.

### The Removal of Divine Ordination

Actually, governments that seek to murder innocents, Christian or non-Christian, are not ordained by God. This can be seen in the Book of Jeremiah, when the prophet Jeremiah is sent to the house of the king of Judah, to relay a message from God. Through Jeremiah, God commands the king: “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood.”<sup>50</sup> If the king “will not obey” this command God swears by himself that the king’s house “shall become a desolation,” and to “prepare destroyers against [the king].”<sup>51, 52</sup> Once again, although God may discipline his servants, but he does not prepare destroyers against them. Therefore when God promises to destroy the de-facto king, it is clear that he is not a king ordained by God. Indeed, through Jeremiah, God asks the false-king of Judah, “Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar?”<sup>53</sup> In a way of answering this question, Jeremiah says that when the false-king dies the people “shall not lament for him, saying, 'Ah, lord!' or 'Ah, his majesty!'”<sup>54</sup> Instead the once-king will be given

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<sup>48</sup> Acts 12:11 ESV

<sup>49</sup> Matthew 12:26 ESV

<sup>50</sup> Jeremiah 22:3 ESV

<sup>51</sup> Jeremiah 22:5 ESV

<sup>52</sup> Jeremiah 22:6 ESV

<sup>53</sup> Jeremiah 22:15 ESV Compete in cedar: the king’s house was made of cedar. It seems to be an expression along the lines of: “do you think you are a king because you live in luxury”?

<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah 22:18 ESV

“the burial of a donkey ... dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem.”<sup>55</sup> When kings cease to rule with righteousness, they lose their authority and the privileges that come with that authority. The “king” of Judah was not an authority in the true sense of the word.

Rather, the destroyer of tyrants acts as God’s avenger to execute wrath on the wrongdoer and therefore has the real right to the title king. Indeed when the king violates the above command, God promises to rise up “Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, [His] servant” to punish “Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste.”<sup>56</sup> Jeremiah then instructs the people of Judah to “bring [their] necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people and live.”<sup>57</sup> While acting as an ordained instrument of divine wrath, the King of Babylon is owed obedience- in accordance with Romans 13.

Nebuchadnezzar, however, is not given unlimited authority. Indeed God promises eventually to “punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity.”<sup>58</sup> The story of this punishment is found in the book of Daniel. Seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, his sleep is disturbed by nightmares, and he goes to Daniel for an interpretation of his dreams. Daniel tells the King that his dreams show that God will take his kingdom because of the King’s pride, but not all hope for Nebuchadnezzar is lost. Daniel counsels the King to stop committing “iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed.”<sup>59</sup> Nebuchadnezzar does not, however, and he loses his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar had a commission from God to punish oppressors, and when he committed the very crime that he was to punish, he lost the authority that came with that commission.

The sins of fathers are often found in their sons, and unfortunately King Belshazzar follows his father’s example. Belshazzar is giving a large feast for his subsidiary lords, and decides to use the gold and silver cups which Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from Solomon’s Temple. While using the cups dedicated to the Lord, Belshazzar praises the gods of silver and

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<sup>55</sup> Jeremiah 22: 19 ESV

<sup>56</sup> Respectively Jeremiah 25:9, 25:18 ESV

<sup>57</sup> Jeremiah 27:12 ESV

<sup>58</sup> Jeremiah 25:12 ESV

<sup>59</sup> Daniel 4:27 ESV

gold. Immediately on the wall a hand “inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN”<sup>60</sup> Deeply troubled Belshazzar asks for an interpretation for he could not read the words. Eventually Daniel is able to reveal the meaning of the words which literally mean: “‘Numbered,’ ‘Numbered,’ ‘To Weigh,’ and ‘To Divide.’”<sup>61</sup>

“MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians”<sup>62</sup>

As seen by this interpretation governments that fail to weigh up to God’s standards cease to enjoy His support. Belshazzar lost his authority because he desecrated the cups of God’s temple. God is zealous for His Temple and He does not give men authority to destroy or desecrate it. God is also zealous for innocent life, after all our bodies are God’s Temple.<sup>63</sup> Therefore governments which destroy innocents created “in the image of God” also lose their authority.<sup>64</sup>

The most explicit instance of a governor losing authority is Israel’s first king: Saul the Benjamite. Saul’s ruled over Israel for a mere two year period, because his rule was cut short by his own corruption. After a victorious battle with the nearby Amalekites, Saul kept their livestock as plunder rather than devoting all the livestock as sacrifice to God.<sup>65</sup> In so doing, Saul used the blood of Israeli warriors to expand his own wealth, and “rejected the word of the LORD.”<sup>66</sup> As a result of Saul’s violation of God’s moral law, God “rejected [Saul] from being king.”<sup>67</sup> Once again as Saul’s rejection displays, governments which intentionally murder innocents- or commit other heinous crimes with full knowledge- do not retain their authority. Saul continued to act as the de facto king of Israel, but he no longer had any right to reign and was a false-king.

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel 5:25 ESV

<sup>61</sup> Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary reference H4484, H8625, H6357

<sup>62</sup> Daniel 5:26-28 ESV

<sup>63</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16, John 2:21

<sup>64</sup> Genesis 1:27 ESV

<sup>65</sup> 1 Samuel 15:9

<sup>66</sup> 1 Samuel 15:23 ESV

<sup>67</sup> 1 Samuel 15:23 ESV

With the concept that authority is given from God conditionally, it is not surprising when the prophet Isaiah declares that Israel's "princes are rebels" because they love "[bribes] and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them."<sup>68</sup> Isaiah continues to pronounce "woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who write oppressive laws."<sup>69</sup> Isaiah describes these tyrants as depriving the needy of justice, robbing the poor, taking widows as their spoil, and preying upon the fatherless.<sup>70</sup> The poor, the widows, and the fatherless were prime targets for the ancient tyrants, but of course robbing anyone or preying upon anyone is a vile violation of the principle of justice upon which society rests. Indeed since "God shows no partiality", and God denounces governments that rob the poor, He too despises governments that rob the rich.<sup>71</sup> As Leviticus 19 says, there should be no injustice in courts, and the judges "shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great."<sup>72</sup> This is important to remember, for in mass democracies tyrants have an easier time preying upon wealthy people. Therefore often the rich members of society are treated inhumanely by modern tyrants- their assets are greedily seized with threat of government violence. Governments that seek to use violence to "redistribute" wealth, from the poor to the rich, or from the rich to the poor- are rebelling against God, and therefore they are not his ministers.

It is important to remember, however, that just as one cake does not a baker make- neither does one act of tyranny make a government tyrannical. This can be seen with King David and King Ahab. David murdered Uriah to steal his wife, and Ahab murdered Naboth to steal his estate. After both of these events, prophets confronted the kings, and they both repented. Even though these rulers horribly corrupted justice, when confronted they humbled themselves and thereafter ruled honorably. Therefore though each of these kings dabbled in tyranny, it would be inaccurate to characterize their rule after their repentance as tyrannical.

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<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 1:23

<sup>69</sup> Isaiah 10:1 NIV The ESV uses the word : "iniquitous" instead of "unjust" that is way I deviated from ESV. This pronouncement of woe is very significant because Romans 8:28 informs us that "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to [God's] purpose." This verse shows that tyrants are not called according to God's purpose, for if they were God's prophet would not be pronouncing woe upon them.

<sup>70</sup> Isaiah 10:1-4 ESV

<sup>71</sup> Romans 2:11, Gal 2:6 ESV

<sup>72</sup> Leviticus 19:15 ESV For more verse showing the importance of impartiality see: Exod. 23:3, Deut. 1:17, Deut 10:17, Deut 16:19, 2 Chron. 19:7, Job 13:10, Job 34:19, Pro 8:15, Pro 24:23, Pro 28:21, Mal 2:9, Luke 20:21, Act 10:34, Eph 6:9, 1 Tim 5:21, James 2:1, James 2:9, James 3:17, 1 Peter 1:17.



Tyrannies are those governments whose “long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evince a design to reduce [the people] under absolute despotism.”<sup>73</sup> Tyrannies exist in opposition to the purpose of government as described in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, so as John Calvin wrote in his commentary on Romans, “dictatorships and unjust governments are not ordained governments.”<sup>74</sup>

### Demonic Powers

Rather just as demons are “angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling” and follow the devil, so too governments that revolt against God’s ordained limits on their power are, in John Milton’s words, “of the Devil.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed if Jesus would worship the devil, Satan promised to give him “all the kingdoms of the world,” for as “the god of this world” Satan has the ability to give the corrupt power of this world “to whom [he] will.”<sup>76</sup> In the end times there will be a tyranny with power “over every tribe and people and language and nation,” this blasphemous tyranny will be empowered by Satan.<sup>77</sup> While present tyrannies are not directly ruled by Satan, they still follow his vicious rule- as *his* ministers.

Tyrants ultimately function as Satan’s servants, as is made clear in the book of Revelation. John, writing the book to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor, gives each church its own miniature message before he writes the common prophecy. To the church in the provincial Capital, Pergamum, John writes “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.”<sup>78</sup> In the message to the Church of Smyrna, John warns Christians that “the devil is about to throw some of you into prison”<sup>79</sup> While Satan does not personally arrest Christians for their faith, and does not literally seat enthroned in the provincial Capital- the

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<sup>73</sup> Jefferson, Thomas. The Declaration of Independence Continental Congress 1776. p.1

<sup>74</sup> Calvin, John. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians* Translated by R. Makenzie Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomaas F. Torrance Eerdmans Publishin Grand Rapids 1976

<sup>75</sup> Jude 1:6 ESV; Milton, John *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* p.7

<sup>76</sup> Respectively Luke 4:5, 2 Cor 4:4, Luke 4:6 ESV

<sup>77</sup> Rev 13:7 ESV As far as being empowered by Satan, the beast- or tyrant is given authority by the Dragon (Rev 13:4) and the Dragon is Satan (Rev 20:2)

<sup>78</sup> Revelation 2:13 ESV

<sup>79</sup> Revelation 2:10 ESV

Roman Provincial government was little more than the human agency by which Satan persecuted the church.

Tyrants are the princes of Satan-operating under his power, as revealed by the prophecy of Ezekiel. Amongst prophecies against various corrupt kings, Ezekiel begins to chastise the “prince of Tyre.”<sup>80</sup> The prince of Tyre acted as though he was a god, and because of this pride God raised Nebuchadnezzar to punish him. After describing the death of the prince of Tyre, God instructs Ezekiel to lament over the king of Tyre:

"Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground."<sup>81</sup>

Judging from these descriptions of the king of Tyre, John Cobin rightly concluded that the king of Tyre is Satan.<sup>82</sup> While the human head of state seemed to men to be a king, he was in God’s mind the prince of Tyre. The true king of Tyre was Satan, and the human government was a proxy by which Satan could work.

If we are to obey God’s ministers, as Romans 13 commands, then logically we ought not obey the vice-regents of Satan. Paul indeed makes this explicit in his epistle to the Ephesians, where he reminds Christians that they struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities,

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<sup>80</sup> Ezekiel 28:2 ESV

<sup>81</sup> Ezekiel 28:12-17 ESV

<sup>82</sup> Cobin, John M. **Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective** AltermtnessBooks 2003, p 89

against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”<sup>83</sup> As essentially demonic, unjust governments are to be struggled against, not to be complied with; to be resisted, not to be obeyed. Not that Christians ought to bear any enmity against the actual persons- for Christians were as the tyrants are- but Christians should have enmity with the actual oppressive laws. Though Christians should not fight the brutal, nor the corrupt, nor the robbers- Christians should fight the acts of brutality, the acts of corruption, the acts of robbery. So in dealing with tyrannies, Christians should not scream “sic simper tyrannis!” and then slay Caesar; rather Christians should subvert the structure of oppression and attempt to rescue its victims.

### Christian Resistance

Many Christians bristle at the notion of resistance, because Jesus commands Christians: “do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther writes that “the right interpretation” of the preceding command is “that Christians should be capable of suffering every evil and injustice.”<sup>85</sup> This does not mean, however, that Christians should let others suffer every evil and injustice! This confirmed by the New Testament’s positive portrayal of Moses defending the Hebrew slave from the Egyptian task-master.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Martin Luther continues to state that Christians may resist evil, “for the sake of others.”<sup>87</sup> Tyrannies of course threaten more than individual Christians- so as G. I. Williamson writes in his commentary on *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, when governments become “bent on aggression, it is the duty of Christians to resist that power because it subverts the ordinance of God.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ephesians 6:12 ESV

<sup>84</sup> Matthew 5:29 ESV

<sup>85</sup> Luther, Martin. *On Secular Authority: How far does the Obedience owed it extend?* Quoted from [Windows on the World](#) Gary Scott Smith and P.C. Kemeny Editors, Copley Custom Publishing. Acton, Mass. 2004. P.124

<sup>86</sup> See Hebrews 11:24-26 and Acts 7:20-29

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Williamson, G.I. [The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes](#) P&R Phillipsburg, NJ. 2004 p.312

Now Christian resistance is a peculiar endeavor: while denying the authority of aggressive states, it does not focus on vengeance or retribution. Instead it focuses on God's command to "rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."<sup>89</sup> The sole Christian motivation for resistance is this: to deliver the unjustly punished from the hand of their oppressors. Therefore Christian resistance is limited to actions that reduce brutality. With that purpose for resistance, as Williamson writes, it is "difficult in many cases to determine precisely when and to what extent a Christian must resist a particular civil government."<sup>90</sup> Determining how to resist tyrannies is beyond this paper's scope, however, and will not be addressed. This paper intends solely to affirm that tyrants are rebelling against God's moral law, and so to obey tyrants is to assist in their rebellion against God's ordinances. In contrast, to resist tyrants is to hinder their revolt against God. Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.

### Objections:

#### **Objection #1** *What about 1 Peter 2:12-17 or Titus 3:1?*

Beginning with 1Peter 2, it is clear that Peter instructs believers to, "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to

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<sup>89</sup> Psalm 82:4 ESV

<sup>90</sup> Williamson, G.I. The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes P&R Phillipsburg, NJ. 2004 p.312

governors.”<sup>91</sup> If this was all that Peter wrote, then one would conclude that Christians must always obey their government. Peter, however, in the preceding verse gives another command: “keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.”<sup>92</sup> As shown by the specific mention of conduct toward gentiles, Peter is writing to newly converted Jews. Indeed 1 Peter is addressed “To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”<sup>93</sup> - that is exiled Jewish Christians. These Jews were familiar with the parameters for a king given in Deuteronomy 17. Among the various constraints on the king, Moses instructs the Jews that “[they] may not put a foreigner over [them]” as king.<sup>94</sup> Therefore the Jews and the new Jewish Christians, as Matthew Henry writes, “concluded that they were bound to obey no sovereign but one *taken from their own brethren*” (that is ethnic Jews).<sup>95</sup> Since the Roman occupying force was not Jewish, the Jews and many Jewish converts to Christ sought to overthrow their rule simply because they were ethnically non-Jewish rulers. Ultimately, this attitude lead to numerous revolts and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70.

These new Christians forgot, or did not know, that in the new covenant “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all.”<sup>96</sup> When Peter writes “be subject to every human institution,” he is commanding believers to obey just institutions, Jewish, Greek, and indeed of any ethnicity.<sup>97</sup> Peter is not suggesting that Christians ought to obey institutionalized evil. To make this clear, he defines more precisely states that Christians should obey governors “as sent by [the emperor] to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”<sup>98</sup> If governors perform this function, we ought to obey them, even in matters where we do not understand the specific purpose of the law. For then we could have faith that this law serves to perform the same general function as the government: punishing those who do evil and praising those who do good.

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<sup>91</sup> 1 Peter 2:13-14 ESV

<sup>92</sup> 1 Peter 2:12 ESV The NIV uses “pagan” as the translation for “ἔθνος” (ethnos), this is really only an implication of the word- and then only in Jewish communities. So the best translation is “Gentiles”

<sup>93</sup> 1 Peter 1:1 ESV

<sup>94</sup> Deuteronomy 17:15 ESV

<sup>95</sup> Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Romans 13:1-6

<sup>96</sup> Romans 10:12 ESV

<sup>97</sup> 1 Peter 2:13 ESV

<sup>98</sup> 1 Peter 2:14 ESV

Christians are to do good, however, regardless of the governor's commands. As Peter teaches in the same breath, Christians should "live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."<sup>99</sup> Living as a servant of God, can be summarized as follows: "love the Lord" and to "love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>100</sup> Hating God or our neighbors, in our thoughts or in our deeds, violates God's commands. So servants of God cannot obey, or be subject to, institutions that ask us to hate God or to hate our neighbors, for as Jesus says "no one can serve two masters."<sup>101</sup>

That subjection to governments is contingent upon the manner in which they use their power is further revealed by the command for servants to "be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."<sup>102</sup> Peter, who was familiar with Paul's epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, knew that Paul commanded masters to treat their servants "justly and fairly."<sup>103</sup> So, in stark contrast with the command to be subject to governors as sent to punish wrongdoers, Peter pointedly instructs believers to be subject to their individual masters (in modern society analogous to employers) who fail to live up to their duty. The reason for this distinction is plain enough: while cruel individual masters may cause believers to suffer; cruel governors cause all to suffer. So while Christians may nobly suffer under their individual masters- they cannot allow governments to brutalize their people. Hopefully it is clear that 1 Peter 2:12-17 does not command believers to obey all governments, rather it commands believers to obey all just rulers regardless of their ethnicity.

Now in Titus 3:1, Paul does tell Titus to "remind [the believers in Crete] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work." When Paul instructs Titus (probably between AD 63 and AD 65) in to *remind* the believers to submit to rulers and authorities is Paul referencing his earlier teaching in his earlier letter to the Romans

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<sup>99</sup> 1 Peter 2:16 ESV

<sup>100</sup> Mark 12:30-31 ESV

<sup>101</sup> Mat 6:24, Luke 16: 13 ESV

<sup>102</sup> 1 Peter 2:18 ESV

<sup>103</sup> Colossians 4:1 ESV

(probably written around AD 57.) The rulers and authorities in Titus 3:1 are the same rulers and authorities from Romans 13- who are indeed owed obedience and submission.

**Objection #2** *Pilate received authority from God to execute Jesus, doesn't that show that even tyrannical governments are instituted by God?*

First Pilate did not receive authority from God to execute Jesus- Satan gave Pilate that power. Observe the actual text that those who make this objection must be referencing, John 19:10-11,

So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Notice Jesus actually says the power has been given to Pilate, not "from God," but "from above." Remember the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly place" mentioned in Ephesians 6:12, it seems like these forces gave Pilate his authority. Yet, some further object, Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was delivered to be crucified "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Well yes this is true, but the plan was for the defeat of the Devil. Genesis 3:15 reveals that plan, "[Christ] shall bruise [Satan's] head, and [Satan] shall bruise [Christ's] heel." God was aware that Satan would, through human agency, bruise Christ's heel- and allowed it so that Christ would defeat Satan by his resurrection. So Pilate was being empowered by the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, used as Satan's tool to strike Christ's heel.

**Objection #3** *What about the Old Testament Legal System? King Hezekiah of Judah for instance destroyed the pagan shrines in Judah with divine support (2 Ki 18:4). Indeed Deuteronomy 13:5 commands that false-prophets be put to death to purge Israel of evil, indeed the same punishment is given for those who refuse to obey priests(17:12), children who refuse to obey parents (21:21), adulterers (22:22), kidnappers (24:7), all with the purpose to "purge evil" from Israel. Therefore don't governments have an obligation to promote morality?*

The Old Testament legal system does not apply directly under the new covenant- as seen by the clear completion of dietary and Sabbath laws. These laws ended, because the Word is going from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, so their purpose of distinguishing the Hebrew people as a chosen race is no longer necessary. Now while the obvious moral issues of adultery or idolatry are not absolved by the New Covenant – the method of “purging evil” from God’s people is significantly different in the New Covenant. Observe Paul’s treatment of this subject in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Those who advocate for the state to punish idolatry, homosexuality, greed or other such “victimless” crimes would do well to think about the distinction Paul makes here about those inside the Church and those outside. Christians may discipline Christians, but even then not with violence- but rather with a gentle rebuke. Then if they refuse to repent and proudly continue all while claiming to be Christians- Christians should refuse to associate with them. This is the completion of the command to “purge the evil person from among you.”

Paul is quite clear, however, that Christians should still associate with unbelievers who are sinners in need of a savior. How then can Christians seek to jail, fine, or in other ways violently punish sinners for their sins? Such legal theory is totally opposed to the Gospel of Grace and Jesus revokes such punishments when he protects the adulteress from the mob recorded as in John 8:3-11.

Paul does still maintain that sinners will be judged- but by God. This further shows that the state should not be in the business of punishing moral depravity. Observe Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13:24-30 regarding God’s Judgment:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and



sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

If governments are to be God's servants to bring wrath on the wrongdoer- it is only to prune those weeds which attempt to grow over the good seed (punishment for crimes that objectively harm others). Ripping out all the weeds (punishing every evil-deed), invariably does more harm than good. While Jews or Pagans might be mistaken in their religious convictions- Christians should not seek to convict them because of these erroneous beliefs. Dietrich Bonhoeffer astutely warned German Christians that ""If the synagogues are set on fire today, it will be the churches that will be burned tomorrow."<sup>104</sup> Christians who promote government policies with the aim of punishing forms of decadence that do not directly injure others, are unwittingly building the gallows for their own execution! Therefore, not only are these attempts to punish vice with the State incompatible with Christian love- they are incredibly unwise.

**Objection #4** *What about the fact that just government, according to 1 Peter are to praise those who do good, and Romans 13 says that if one does what is right one will receive just government's "approval [or praise]" because just government is "God's servant for your good," therefore governments have a commission to praise those who do good. Due to this commission, governments should engage in social engineering: providing positive reinforcement for every good deed.*

While Governors should praise those who do good, governments should not, in order to praise those who do what is good, extend the violence of the law beyond the purpose of punishing injurious criminals. While governments can praise those that do good; they must do so without harming others. After all since there is a universal command to love our neighbors, and Romans 13:10 tells us that "Love

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<sup>104</sup> Steve, Argo. *Bonhoeffer's Message: No Compromise With Evil*. Madison Capital Times. February 4, 2006

does no wrong [κακός] to a neighbor,” in seeking to praise those that do good- governments must not harm[κακός] citizens who have done no wrong[κακός.] Government praise should therefore consist of literal and not metaphorical praise: for example citations for exemplary conduct.

**Objection #5** *What about government production of “public goods”? Roads, bridges, etc are often created and maintained by governments. In fact, the United States Constitution claims that the U.S. Congress has the justified right to establish “post Roads” (Article 1 Section 8). Also it is hard to imagine private organizations managing roads, shouldn’t the government provide that which the free-market is incapable of supplying?*

First, while the Constitution does establish the legal scope of American government- it does not set ethical principles- if it did set ethical principles there would be no provision for amendments. Now, the notion that it is ethical to collect taxes for the creation or maintenance of roads, bridges, hydroelectric plants, or other “public” goods, is predicated on the belief that it is permissible for some men to forcibly seize that which belongs to other men for the promotion of the “common good.” Taxes are forcibly taken- they are indeed a form of extortion! If a citizen- such as Ed Brown- refuses to pay his taxes- then that citizen is thrown into prison. So in deciding whether or not it is just to levy taxes for a project- one is deciding when it is just to throw men into prison! Should men be threatened with jailers over bridges or roads?

While the obvious answer to that question should be a resolute “no!” perhaps mere human reason is not sufficient. In that case, consider the words of Habakkuk 2:12, “woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!” When governments threaten violence to raise money for road construction- they are building a town with blood. There is no essential difference between individual burglars, who for their own “personal benefit” threaten bank tellers to obtain money, and a group of men who for the “common good” threaten every household to obtain money.

As to the supposed inability of the free-market to provide roads- or other “public goods,” this complaint is a mere distraction! While Walter Block may answer these “pragmatic”

complaints in depth, what is “pragmatism” but the worship of the stomach- ethics are sacrificed to “pragmatism” in order to fulfill any desire of the pragmatist. If roads could not exist without theft- then so much the worse for roads! Unfortunately, many Christians see problems with the world and then turn to the State to solve any potential issue. These Christians would do well to remember that trusting in oppression is a false-hope (Isaiah 30:12-13.)

**Objection # 6** *Paul might be saying that governments, as a whole, are a global good. In that case, Paul's argument might have the following structure: "Obey all governments, because governments as a whole are good.*

First even if government was a global good, it does not follow that obedience should give to all governments. Cars in general might provide transportation, but one should not try to use a vehicle with flat tires!

Secondly, it is doubtful that governments are a global good. Nor was Paul likely to believe that governments were a general good: every King of Israel and roughly half of the Kings of Israel were described as evildoers . Indeed after analyzing every government policy in the Bible John Cobin found that “government acts were evil 78.4% of the time.”<sup>105</sup> Martin Luther wrote that “from the beginning of the world, a prudent ruler has been a rare bird; much rarer still is one that is godly. Ordinarily they are the greatest fools or the worst rascals on earth, and little good is to be expected of them”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Cobin, John M. The Bible and Government Alertness Books 2003: 98

<sup>106</sup> Luther, Martin. *On Secular Authority: How Far does the Obedience Owed it Extend?* As quoted in Martin Luther, the Hero of the Reformation by Jacobs, Henry Eyster. G.P.Putnam's 1898, p. 224

