

Appendix I - Subjection to Higher Powers

“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.” Let me provide some background on Romans 13:1, a verse which has been used in the past to support citizen disarmament. One of the last pastors on earth that I thought would fall for this ploy has recently joined their team, and is recommending that the members of his congregation surrender their weapons to the “authorities” if a domestic conflict arises in the future. He is teaching this in complete disregard of *isagogics* – the historical context in which the passage in question was written and the nature of the audience Paul was writing to.

The idea is being propagated that if our government wants to disarm us, we must submit to its authority no matter what the condition is, because this verse does not state any exceptions to the principle of submitting to the higher powers. Put simply, if our government wants to violate the 2nd and 4th Amendments, that’s too bad for Christians – we have to submit to the higher powers even if they are behaving illegally. I’ll be the first to agree that *authority orientation* is crucial to the functioning of a free society, but does that include surrendering our freedom to a tyrannical government? Some pastors are teaching that since God placed Nero in office and Christians obeyed him (to the point of being burned alive or killed by animals in the arena), then we have no right to resist our government’s dictates.

Let me make an isagogical point here. Historically, a lot of Jews - during the time in which the book of Romans was being written - were becoming Christians, and a large contingency of both camps were rejecting the rule of pagan Rome. Paul was concerned that his new converts were becoming anarchists, rejecting the authority of *all* government officials whether Jewish or Roman. *He needed to correct this growing trend.* But that does not mean this passage should be used, as followers of Hitler did, to invoke a form of the “Divine Right of Kings” in order to disarm the populace. We know how that turned out! This misguided application would make it unlawful for any Christian to resist a tyrant, even to the point of being unable to protect his own life and that of his family from false imprisonment or death.

If this principle is taken to its extreme, then events like the Protestant Reformation and the founding of our country by ‘rebels’ was illegitimate. This passage (Romans 13:1-7) has been misused by oppressive regimes throughout history, as if nobody has the right to resist tyranny because the “higher powers” are owed unconditional obedience. Point of fact: In this country, the ultimate authority is the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. When politicians break these laws of the land, **THEY** are the ones who are defying the “higher powers,” not those who seek to have the Constitution adhered to.

“A participatory democracy is a radically different thing from the government of which Paul speaks in Romans 13:1-7. It is expected in a participatory democracy that bad laws are to be changed and bad officials are to be ousted. That has to affect how one brings Romans 13 into 20th century America” (Fee & Stuart).

We have to ask what the nature of the authority is that has been given to our rulers in the Constitution before we voluntarily place our necks on their chopping block. The olive branch was offered to the King of England repeatedly before the Continental Congress dissolved the ties that bound us together. One of the supporting verses for the pacifist movement, often overlooked by pastors today, is 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.” But if you flip this statement around, you get a common sense qualification understood by the framers of

our Constitution. *What if our politicians are a terror to good works instead of being a terror to evil?* In other words, what if the scenario is completely reversed from what Paul is describing?

What if the governing authorities of the United States violate the Constitution and Bill of Rights and begin a gradual, socialistic enslavement of the people? Should we rebel against such a revolution, in effect becoming a counter-revolution, or a Re-founding or Re-construction of the legitimate authority that is being usurped? Should we adopt the words of Thomas Jefferson: *"Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God"*? He and Benjamin Franklin proposed placing this motto on the Great Seal of the United States. Flags were made with this phrase on them and Christians marched into battle against the British believing in this motto. Were they violating Scripture?

"The bottom line is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the State" (Schaeffer).

I think we should all read a sermon delivered by Jonathan Mayhew in 1749. I have attached some selected quotes from this sermon in Appendix P, courtesy of Chuck Baldwin.

"If rulers are a terror to good works, and not to the evil; if they are not ministers for good to society, but for evil and distress, by violence and oppression; if they execute wrath upon sober, peaceable persons, who do their duty as members of society; and suffer rich and honorable knaves to escape with impunity ; if instead of attending continually upon the good work of advancing the public welfare, they attend only upon the gratification of their own lust and pride, and ambition, to the destruction of the public welfare ; if this be the case, it is plain that the apostle's argument for submission does not reach them; they are not the same, but different persons from those whom he characterizes; and who must be obeyed according to his reasoning" (J. Mayhew).

In the meantime, I know what my position is on this controversial subject:

"Sometimes we just need to render unto Caesar a good, old fashioned, ass whoopin'." (Anonymous blogger)

Let's hope this happens in the next election, because I fear for our Bill of Rights.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, 1993, Zondervan Publishing House.

A Christian Manifesto, Francis Schaeffer, 1981, Crossway Books.

A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-resistance to the Higher Powers, with Some Reflections on the Resistance Made to King Charles, Jonathan Mayhew, 1749.