

Would it be sinful for a citizen, whether a Christian or a non-Christian, to rebel against his Government?

The brief answer would be: Yes.

The scriptural passages that deal with a Christian's obedience to the government are found principally in Romans 13:1-6, 1st Peter 2:13-17, and in the pithy command of Matthew 22:21.

Furthermore, "to resist" could mean a variety of things from less to greater seriousness. For example, would it be biblically sinful to disobey a new tax law, or an unconstitutional law, or to overthrow a government engaged in corrupt and illegal actions? Again, the answer would be: Yes.

As for examples of illegal governmental action and corrupt government in the New Testament, there are these: Paul's detention at Philippi (Acts 16); our Lord's trial before Pilate (John 18:28-19:16); the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-12); the massacre of the first martyrs of Christ (Matthew 2:16). Examples of corruption would be these: Felix wanting a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:26); the tax collectors for the Roman government (Luke 19:1-8); the Herodians who were involved with plans to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6); and the acceptance of bribery by the governmental soldiers at the tomb (Matthew 28:11-15).

Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus did not command nor did his Bible command that whenever a government was corrupt or engaged in violating its own laws that Christians could resist or overthrow their government for

the purpose of justice and for the punishment of that government. Indeed, as the apostle points out with sharp threatening words (Romans 13:1-7), and the Lord to Pilate (John 19:11), that it is the Almighty who has set up the current government in power. God knows that there is an ever-eager tendency in sinful man to hate and to rebel against his government, to set himself up as a judge and an avenger against his government, and to ignore the fact that God has set it up. Men do not have permission to play God, and to overthrow a government; or, to put it another way, to take from God his prerogative. If someone would resist or overthrow, he will be resisting and overthrowing God himself.

Again, look at the examples from biblical history, recalling the Lord's remarks, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8)! Under the same king which God had installed in office (Romans 13:1) the apostle James was put to death, though later, in another case, God intervened miraculously to spare the apostle Peter (Acts 12:1-3, 11). Paul was beheaded, yet the apostle John died of old age. Earlier, Paul had been arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Later, he was set free (Acts 16:19-24, 39). In spite of these abuses of power, the Lord did not command, on the basis of these governmental outrages, that Christians could actively resist or overthrow their government as judge and executioner (Deuteronomy 32:45). Daniel was a citizen of the nation of Babylon. After the Almighty promised publicly that there would be an overthrow of that government (Daniel 5:24-28), Daniel did not assist in the subsequent overthrow, nor did he afterward try to subvert the occupying forces of the new government by

organizing an underground movement or a guerrilla force, for instance, but lived as an obedient citizen of the new government, observing the biblical teachings that "God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever he chooses" (Daniel 5:21). The almighty God, who has all power over all things, "removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21).

To be sure, according to the command of God (Romans 13) the Christian's obedience to and his respect for government is a religious duty which he owes to God. Just the same, this does not mean that a Christian or even God himself will connive at the evil which a government would do; nor will a Christian's obedience to and respect for his government, in effect, amount to his being an accomplice to the evil which his government would do; or that any obedience to, respect for, and prayers for an evil government would be giving aid and comfort to evil men. God, in his biblical commands and statements, has never considered such to be the case.

For example, the prophet Daniel was a high official in a heathen government - the secretary of the treasury. Any heathen government, administered by officials who have not been regenerated into God's kingdom would naturally tend to be corrupt and engaged in malicious activities. For instance, high officials in the Babylonian government were so jealous and filled with malice, they plotted to have pious Daniel put to death. In addition, the king Nebuchadnezzar had the eyes of the Jewish king put out after killing his sons before him (2nd Kings 25:7). Whether this had been an exceptional case of cruelty, as a divine punishment on this Jewish king, or whether such cruelty had been a common occurrence among the

Babylonians, would this event sound like the act of an upright government filled with integrity? Indeed, king Nebuchadnezzar at one point arbitrarily wanted to put his wise men to death as punishment because they could not read his mind (Daniel 2:2-12). Yet God put Daniel into such a government as a high administrator of its policies, expected Daniel to stay there, and did not accuse him of sinning by being where he was. Indeed, if a common citizen would have had a righteous complaint against the Babylonian government, he would have considered Daniel to be an integral part of that government.

If the government would be a good one, it will be a blessing sent to the people by God. If it would be a bad one: illegal, corrupt, unjust, and oppressive, it will be sent by God purposely as a punishment on that people for their unbelief and for their supportive sins of unbelief. Indeed, after any people would act toward God and his blessings in a tyrannical way, he will punish them with the same dose of tyranny. Thus when patriot Americans would complain about and have contempt for tyrannical American government, in self-blindness they will refuse to see just how tyrannical they have treated the God of heaven.

Indeed, "As the people are, so will the government be" the axiom goes. That is, "However good or bad the people may be, so will the government be." If a government would be tyrannical, it is because the people will be tyrannical. If the government would be corrupt, lawless, and selfish, it is because the people will be that way in their everyday lives.

Just the same, there is an exception to the biblical command for obedience to the government. It would be when the powers-that-be would command you to do something against the clear Word of God (Acts 5:29; Exodus 1:15-21). In these two biblical cases, the resistance consisted in the form of non-compliance.

In regards to the matter of self defense, there are the following biblical examples. Though David had been divinely assured that he would be the next king (1st Samuel 16:13); though he was persistently pursued by King Saul in order to be put to death merely on account of Saul's malice, he did not kill King Saul in self defense when he had the opportunities to do so, but at the hazard of his life simply fled and hid from Saul (1st Samuel 18:6-27:1). This was not cowardly of David, nor was it mere common sense. He was obeying as best he could God's command not to kill the Lord's anointed ruler no matter how unlawfully that ruler acted according to civil law or to biblical law. When God provided him with a means to avoid having to kill in self defense, David took it. All the while God blessed him with protection. Be clear on this! What should you do in light of this? Do your biblical duty! Repent, pray, ask God for his protection, and rely on his protection pledged to defend you and yours!

After Joseph was notified by God of the deadly attempt which King Herod would make on the life of the Christ child, God commanded Joseph to prevent that event by fleeing to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14), not by taking up a sword and fighting it out to the death against Herod's forces (Matthew 2:16) all by himself, nor aided by a miracle from Heaven in which Herod's band would be struck with blindness (2nd Kings 6:8), or destroyed by

fire (2nd Kings 1:9-10), for example, nor blessed by the assistance of the fighting angels (2nd Kings 6:17; Daniel 10:13). Nevertheless, all the while God blessed Joseph with protection.

Perhaps from a foreboding of danger during that week of the Passover, or perhaps as a common practice, the disciples carried swords with them (Luke 22:38). In Gethsemane Peter used one in self defense (Fifth Commandment) to protect the Lord (John 18:10-11; Matthew 26:53). However, in this case the facts would be different. The Lord neither needed, wanted, nor commanded Peter's physical defense (see also Luke 4:30; John 8:59). At his word Jesus made the arresting party fall backward to the ground (John 18:6), and he could have kept them pinned there. Jesus also could have called upon the angels to protect him (Matthew 26:53). Moreover, Jesus had warned his disciples ahead of time that it would be God's will that at this time he should be captured and put to death (Matthew 20:18; Luke 18:31-33; John 18:11). In this connection, the Almighty saw to it that the disciples' lives would be safeguarded nonetheless (John 18:8-9), yet he had some sharp threats to Peter about the anxious desire of common citizens to use deadly force against authority, even unjust authority (Matthew 26:52).

In regards to the warning of the Lord that "he who does not have a sword should sell his upper garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36), his words were meant to be taken figuratively, not literally, just as on another occasion his choice of the word "sword" was figurative (Matthew 10:34), as the Holy Spirit used it also (Luke 2:25 & 35). That is to say, as children who would lose their father

will have to think and to provide for themselves suddenly, so the Lord forewarned his disciples with a sense of urgency that after his ascension they would have to do the same. Indeed, in the future, after the disciples would be hunted down and killed like animals, they “will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man” (Luke 17:22) when he formerly gave them uncommon preservation, such as on their missionary journey (Luke 22:35; 10:1-20). Hence later on we do not read that the disciples took Jesus’ command literally as they had originally on Maundy Thursday evening to the Lord’s frustration (Luke 22:38). For example, though out of necessity the apostles urged the election of deacons (Acts 6:4), they did not urge the election of deacons with swords for a bodyguard. After the illegal arrests of the apostles (Acts 4:3; 5:18), during the general imprisonment of the Christians (Acts 8:1-4), or when Peter himself was arrested (Acts 12:3), Peter did not draw a sword in defense as he had in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10).

Instead of turning himself in to an unjust arrest warrant, or waiting to be captured, Paul was let down in a basket and escaped (2nd Corinthians 11:33). Paul stood on his rights which he had as a Roman citizen, not only to preserve the honor of the gospel (Acts 16:37) but to spare himself from imminent unjust harm and unjust death (Acts 22:25; 25:11), not from an intent of fear or of selfishness, but of love (Romans 13:8; 1st Corinthians 10:23). After he had been released from jail by an angel, it was implied by this miraculous act that Peter should not turn himself back in to the government, but to escape its forces (Acts 12:1-11).

Consider this! After the first few mob incidents, Paul did not arm himself with a sword nor did he have an armed bodyguard to act in his defense, but continued to enter city after city unarmed. His only defense was to escape (and to pray). To be sure, unlike David and unlike Peter in Gethsemane, both of whom carried swords as private citizens, Paul was acting in his capacity as a missionary for the gospel’s sake. The spirit of a Christian missionary or a preacher is not to have the militant intent of the armed crusades of a Saul (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2), but of the saving of souls (Luke 9:54-56; 1st Corinthians 9:22-23).

These are cases of self-defense which Scripture has left for us.

The various judges that are listed in the Old Testament book of Judges had been called by God and specifically authorized by him to use deadly force to deliver the Israelites politically.

Late in the lives of the apostles, and throughout the subsequent periods of martyrdom in the Roman Empire, the Christians did not arm themselves for self-defense against their government. Their self-defense consisted in escaping, in hiding, and in worshiping in secret. In another case, a legion of soldiers, consisting of about 6,000 men, called the Theban legion, were all Christians. Ordered by the Roman emperor, Maximian, to drive Christianity out of France, they refused. Twice the emperor ordered the legion to be decimated, that is, that every tenth man be killed. Enraged at their continued refusal to obey, the emperor commanded the whole legion to be put to death.

With that being said, the original question at the beginning of this article now will be narrowed to the following: "May a citizen, Christian or non-Christian, for the purpose of self defense, resist with deadly force not a common robber, but his own government, after the latter has sent officers to threaten his life, the lives of his family, or the life of his neighbor?" The answer would be this: There is no command or permission from God for you to do so. There is no promise from God that he will bless you in such an act. Thus you will have no divine assurance that such an act would be doing God's will.

In fact, think about this: How many times in the history of the world has this situation ever occurred? Historically, if rulers would have sent armed soldiers to enter a citizen's home, to confront a citizen on the street, or at work, it would have been to arrest him, not to murder him in his bed.

First of all, the rules for self defense, which would fall under the Fifth Commandment, will allow, but not command you to preserve your life at all costs. See John 15:13 and 1st Corinthians. Essential elements for self defense would be that the citizen would not provoke the difficulty, and that there must be imminent danger without a reasonable way to escape.

One case of self defense with the use of deadly force, which was part of the civil laws given by God to and meant only for the Old Testament political state of Israel, was in regard to a thief who would break into a house at night (Exodus 22:2-3).

All other situations which would involve governmental actions towards a citizen that are not imminent, life-threatening, could not be considered on

the basis of self defense rights, but would be political matters which already have been covered in the paragraphs and in the adequate biblical passages above.

Just the same, it might be asked, for instance, "As an American military man I took an oath to defend the *Constitution* (not the government) and this country from all enemies foreign and domestic. I consider no expiration date on that oath. Could I fight righteously and rightfully against the current government which, by evidence, has become a domestic enemy both to the *Constitution* and to this country?"

Positively speaking, God is silent. That is, biblically he gives no permission, no assurance, and no support for the unique situation in which a constitution would give its citizens constitutional permission to defy or to overthrow its own government for sustainable reasons. The only divine assurance which God has given to a citizen, Christian or non-Christian, is in regards to the matter of obedience to his government, which has been stated already in the biblical passages above.

Would there be anything biblically wrong, would there be any violation of Romans 13, if a person currently holding an office in government, such as a county sheriff, who would choose to enforce a constitutional law and not an unconstitutional law? No. Would there be anything biblically wrong with citizens supporting such constitutional sheriffs? No.

Would there be any conflict with the biblical commands of Romans 13 if a citizen would urge his state to protect him from criminal and unconstitutional activities of the federal government by taking certain

legal or political steps up to and including secession from the Union? No.

Though Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln spoke of the revolutionary right of the American citizen to overthrow the U.S. government should it become tyrannical or unconstitutional, Scripture recognizes no such right. In fact, after the Southern States did not want to overthrow what they believed to be a tyrannical government, but simply to secede from it, Lincoln himself objected to it.

Indeed, revolt is a remedy routinely worse than the problem. In rebellions the innocent typically have suffered more than the guilty. To be sure, a change in governments brought about by force cannot guaranty at all that there will be any improvement in government. Anarchy only would make it worse.

Moreover, if the cry would go up: "How could I overthrow this tyrannical government? The election ballot will not work," realize this: Since it would be God who has installed this tyranny in place; since it would be he who has brought it into existence for the express purpose of punishing a country, he is not going to let his efforts be thwarted by petty men! He will not bless their efforts to overthrow it. In fact, he would be against any insurgents who would ruin his plans. Thus the question is not: "How could I overthrow this tyrannical government?" but "This is a punishment sent from God. We have done evil. We must repent. We must get on God's side. Only then will the punishment be removed."

"Since revolution is sinful according to Scripture, how is it that the thirteen American colonies revolted, yet God blessed them ultimately with success?"

Both of those facts are true. As to why America was blessed with success in regards to its revolt for independence, the Bible answers that such acts would be due solely to God's grace and goodness for his own unfathomable purposes (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-34), though he still has threatened the human race with punishment for rebellion. The ancient "Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans all did this and God permitted it and even let these nations grow and prosper in spite of it. However, the final outcome was always tragic."¹ The Southern States in America also once rebelled. Yet God did not bless them ultimately with success. Nevertheless, there is more to this matter. God does not promote wickedness, such as revolution, by crowning it with his blessing. He is a holy God. He abhors sin. There would have to be another reason why God moved himself to tip a war of punishment ultimately in the favor of the American revolutionists.

It was the gospel-believing prayers of humble, repentant Christians resigning their cause into their Lord's hands. That will do it every time. The Lord promises.

When the Continental Congress held its first session in Carpenter Hall, Philadelphia, years ago, it began with prayer. Doctor Jacob Duche opened the meeting with a petition which started, "O Lord, our heavenly Father, high and mighty King of Kings, Lord of lords... look down, we beseech Thee, upon those

¹ Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," translator Charles M. Jacobs, *Luther's Works*, editor Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), Volume 46, page 107.

American states who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor... to be henceforth dependent only upon Thee!" He continued to pray for peace and asked that "truth and justice, that religion and piety, prevail and flourish"; and, he concluded, petitioning for the members of the first Continental Congress: "Preserve the health of their bodies... and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, and our Savior."

The Lord pledges: "If my people, who are called by my name, would humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2nd Chronicles 7:14).

Indeed, after war became inevitable, one of the first concerns of the Congress was to appoint days of humiliation and prayer. Washington notes in his diary how on this occasion he "went to church and fasted all day." In his diary John Adams recounted week after week the texts of the sermons which he had heard. These examples demonstrate the Christian faith that existed among those who supported independence. It was in stark contrast to the hearts of the revolutionaries in Europe.

Keep in mind that not all of the colonists supported independence! Approximately one third of the colonists remained loyal to the British, another third was neutral or disinterested, and the other third were the political Whigs who supported independence. Moreover, in all of these groups there were Christians and non-Christians.

The American citizen who would be greatly offended by the current intent and actions of his government, and would greatly want it to return to the state in which the Founding Fathers established it, by destroying it through rebellion, and then, rebuilding it on the ruins, must remember this: The current government is only one of a number of punishments brought upon this country for which God is fully justified in meting out a great punishment come due. The attempt to get rid of one of God's punishments would be like trying to empty the ocean with a bucket.

To bring an end to God's punishment, the people of America need to return to God in repentance and faith. That is his unbreakable rule.

Again this brings us back to the same matter: patriot Americans complain of all of the dishonest, unethical, immoral, and criminal activity of those in government, and of how that in turn creates serious problems for the citizen regarding his safety, finances, and freedoms, etc. The patriot Americans do not see the connection here. After Americans threw out Christianity, that is, after they left it, or exchanged biblical Christianity for a counterfeit imitation of their own liking, they also threw out morality, ethics, honesty, and uprightness. In other words, a nation cannot throw out Christianity and still expect the country to function as a moral, ethical, upright, honest people. It will not. The people that have exchanged Christianity for personal selfishness will now live in a miserable world of selfishness. Yet patriot Americans are surprised at all of the corruption in government. However the corruption is not restricted to government. It is all around you in your neighbors. "As

the people are, so the government will be" the saying goes.

If you would want an honest upright government that obeys the law and has integrity, you will have to Christianize it first. Who is going to do that? Patriot Americans may offer political complaints or political solutions such as, "They should not be doing that," though it would be simply a case of the pot calling the kettle "black." Yet they are at a loss when it comes to the task of how to make people in government, and those who elect them, moral.

Prayer/Hymn

O bless, Thou heav'nly Potentate
With wisdom, strength, the pow'rs of state,
That wrong and violence may cease,
And Church and home abide in peace!

Bless rich and poor, the great and small,
Both friend and foe; Lord, bless Thou all
The family on earth in love,
And fit all for Thy home above!

Thus, with Thy blessing on each hand,
Will peace and plenty fill the land,
And righteousness spring from the earth,
And life below have higher worth.

All praise to Thee, O king of kings,
Whose grace to us such blessings brings;
Thee, with the Father, we adore,

And Holy Ghost, forevermore!

Anonymous.