

*Should deadly Force be used by a Christian
against his Government?*

Should a Christian resist when it would be beyond a reasonable doubt that his government would seek his arrest either for imprisonment or for his death sentence, either by way of an unlawful action on the part of government, or by an action which has been accepted as being legal? That is, should he rebel against his government either by using deadly resistance in his defense, or by using deadly force in a preemptive strike against his government?

Biblical examples of this will be the following.

When faced with credible governmental death threats after having violated neither the laws of the country, nor the moral laws of God, David fled the country, Elijah fled the country, and Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus fled the country.

While David had been anointed by God to be the next king, he did not resort to self-defense, when presented twice with a testing by God to do so (1st Samuel 24; 26), in order to defend himself against the government: mad King Saul and his arbitrary, malicious, groundless, and needless death sentence against David. Instead David fled, and kept on fleeing until he finally left his country (1st Samuel 27:1).

Though on one occasion God protected Elijah from his government's groundless arrest by a miracle of destroying fire from heaven, on another occasion the Lord did not, and Elijah had to flee the country (1st Kings 9:2-3).

After the government, King Herod, groundlessly with malicious intent and fearing needlessly for his throne, sought the life of the infant Jesus, God commanded Joseph to flee the country. God did not choose to protect his Son's life by a miracle by sending down fire from heaven to destroy Herod's soldiers, for instance. Instead he commanded Joseph to flee the country, and to return after a few years.

When the tribe of Israel was enslaved by a political decision of the Egyptian government for hundreds of years, God did not command them to take up arms to resist it, or to overthrow the government. The all-knowing God expected them to be patient and to obey the government until a time when he would decide to free them. After Moses prematurely and arbitrarily tried his hand at striking back at tyranny (), God did not bless his effort with success.

Centuries later, after the kingdom of Judah was practically annihilated in a punishing war by God, and the few survivors were resettled in Babylon by force, God told them through his prophet, Jeremiah, "to seek the peace of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7) of Babylon in their prayers to God, not to pray that such a tyrannically cruel government (2nd Kings 25:7; Daniel 2:5, 10-13) would be

overthrown. Neither did God command the captive Jews to organize an underground movement, to gather weapons, secretly to drill volunteers, to engage in sabotage, or to begin guerrilla activities. They were to obey their new tyrannical government that had defeated them in war, and had resettled them by force according to God's will and punishment. Moreover, after Daniel and other Jews were ordered by the Babylonian government to serve in the administration, which king had his moments of cruelty, Daniel and the others did not decline or resist, but agreed. What is more, God himself did not consider them to be traitors to the Jews. He blessed them (Daniel 1:3-20).

In the New Testament, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter would provide defense for Jesus, who was innocent, to keep him from being arrested by the temple police sent by the High Priest for the purpose of trial and execution, Jesus scolded Peter, giving him the deadly warning regarding those who would rebel against authority, "Put your sword in its place, for all who would take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Later in the New Testament, in his high wisdom for the good of his church, God allowed the government to seize the apostle James and to put him to death for his religious beliefs, by which death he would glorify God (John 21:19). Yet when the government would repeat the same action by seizing the apostle Peter, God miraculously freed Peter before his execution, after which Peter fled and hid from the government.

On the other hand, when it would be beyond a reasonable doubt that his government would seek the Christian's arrest either for imprisonment or for his death after that Christian intentionally had disobeyed a civil law in order faithfully to obey a moral law of God, what could and should a Christian do?

He should obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), be willing to suffer the legal consequences for his non-compliance, and leave his future, either miraculous deliverance or suffering, in God's hands.

Biblical examples of this will be the following.

After the Hebrew midwives in Egypt were asked to give an account before the head of the Egyptian government as to why, according to a newly passed Egyptian law, the male babies of the Hebrew mothers were not put to death immediately upon birth, representatives of the midwives did not merely withhold the truth of the matter from the Pharaoh, but intentionally lied to him in order to spare the lives of both the babies and of the midwives in the interest of obeying God's moral law (Acts 5:29), to which the Egyptian law was opposed. As a consequence of their action, Scripture intentionally relates the further information that far from punishing them for lying, God blessed them materially (Exodus 1:15-21).

Centuries later Jonathan, King Saul's son, disobeyed his father's anti-biblical law in order to spare David's life

(1st Samuel 20:1-9, 27-33), and thus followed the biblical maxim: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

After the servants of King Saul had been ordered to kill the high priests of God because the priests had showed mercy on David by feeding him, the servants refused to obey their king's legal command (1st Samuel 22:17). However, Doeg, subsequently, in the same incident, obeyed the king's legal command, and killed the priests including their families (1st Samuel 22:6-19).

Years later King David's advisor, Hushai, did not merely withhold the truth from rebellious and treasonous Absalom, which truth Absalom, in his rebellion, had no right to know, but knowingly and intentionally lied to him in order to spare the life of King David. As a consequence, David's life was spared (2nd Samuel 15:31-37; 16:16-19; 17:5-14).

Obadiah, who was a high governmental official in charge of King Ahab's palace, despite the royal death sentences of the queen upon the prophets of the Lord, obeyed God rather than men by hiding and by feeding one hundred of these prophets (1st Kings 18:3-4). Moreover, after Elijah told Obadiah to arrange a meeting with the king, and Obadiah was convinced that the king would put him to death in light of his attempt, Obadiah went ahead anyway, left his future in God's hands, and let God's will be done (1st Kings 18:7-16).

As Elijah was carrying out his duty of relaying a God-given prophecy about the impending death of his unrepentant king, that king gave a governmental order to two separate troops for the purpose of seizing Elijah for some act of retaliation. After the commanders of each troop spoke with contempt for Elijah's office, not only did Elijah not obey their order to surrender to their custody, but refused. At this time God protected Elijah. By God's prompting and with God's personal pledge of assistance, fire came down from heaven miraculously, and destroyed both troops (2nd Kings 1:2-12), just as on a later occasion, after mocking children asserted a similar contempt for God's Word, they met with an immediate miraculous death (2nd Kings 2:24).

Though a law of government was passed maliciously and intentionally aimed at Daniel in order to kill him under color of law which prohibited prayer to anyone other than to the Persian king, Daniel continued his practice of public praying, that is, of public confession, and did not resort to private prayer which would have been a denial of his confession of faith. Though Daniel was sentenced to death by the government as a result, God miraculously saved his life (Daniel 6:4-23).

Indeed, on other occasions God miraculously saved the lives of Daniel and of his companions (Daniel 2:16-19; 3:8-30).

The wise men disobeyed King Herod's command to report back to him on the whereabouts of the Messiah

after God had warned them not to do so. They obeyed God rather than the government. They avoided Herod, and returned to their own country (Matthew 2:7-12).

Later on in the apostolic age, after city rulers and citizens began reacting violently to the Christians because of their religious beliefs, not only infringing on their civil rights but threatening them with mob violence and with death (Acts 13:50; 14:4-5, 9; 16:19-23; 17:5-8; 19:28-29; 2nd Corinthians 11:25-26), the apostles did not command the Christians to arm themselves, to drill, or to study tactics for the purpose of self-defense, or for the resistance of or the overthrow of a tyrannical government. The apostle Paul, for instance, would either leave town, or would be urged to leave town by fellow Christians. Moreover, the Christians did not resist when they were arrested and thrown into jail though they had violated no civil laws (Acts 16:19-23). In fact, God saw to it that the apostle Paul was released.

Later, during the Roman persecutions under the emperor Nero and his successors, in which Christians were sentenced to death for their refusal to throw a pinch of incense on a burning altar, and thus worship the emperor as God, the Christians did not practice self-defense individually or in groups against the Roman government, which government clearly was tyrannical. As a result, such Christians were rounded up and herded, not into cattle cars and sent to death ditches, but into naval galleys and sent to death in the Coliseum arena. Yet by such death they confessed Christ, and glorified God by their deaths (John 21:19).

For example, a legion of soldiers, consisting of about 6,000 men, were all Christians. It was called the Theban legion. Roman emperor Maximian ordered them to march to Gaul to assist in fighting against the rebels of Aquitania. Before engaging the enemy Maximian ordered a general sacrifice. He also commanded the men to swear to assist him in driving Christianity out of Gaul.

Each soldier of the Theban legion refused either to sacrifice or to take the oath prescribed. This so greatly enraged Maximian that he ordered the legion to be decimated, that is, every tenth man was to be put to death. When the surviving soldiers stood firm a second decimation was ordered.

By the advice of their officers the remaining soldiers sent a letter to Maximian, stating, "Our arms are devoted to the emperor's use, and shall be directed against his enemies; but we cannot stain our hands with Christian blood; and how, indeed, could you, O Emperor! Be sure of our fidelity, should we violate our obligation to our God, in whose service we solemnly engaged before we entered the army? You command us to search out and to destroy the Christians; it is not necessary to look any farther than ourselves; we ourselves are Christians, and we glory in the name. We saw our companions fall without the least complaint, and though them happy in dying for the sake of Christ. But nothing shall make us lift up our hands against our sovereign; we would rather die wrongfully, and by that means preserve our innocence, than live under a load of guilt. Whatever you

command, we are ready to suffer; we confess ourselves to be Christians, and therefore cannot persecute our brothers nor sacrifice to idols.”

In response the emperor became enraged, and commanded the whole legion to be put to death.

Just the same, these responses of the Christians were not foolish, nor against the command to preserve life according to the Fifth Commandment. These Christians in Roman times did not submit to the government out of fear, or out of pessimism that “resistance to government is futile.” Rather they served the living God by obeying that government, and not rebelling against it, which God had placed over them; which they obeyed as an act of worship according to his command (1st Peter 2:13; Romans 13:5). They did not fear the worst which man could do to them, but feared him who could destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

Later the Roman emperors would have none but Christian bodyguards. The Roman citizens would deal preferably with Christian merchants. Roman parents preferably would have Christian slaves to care for their children because they could be trusted to do a conscientious job.

Conclusion.

(1) It would be wrong for a Christian to rebel against a tyrannical government for (a) Scripture makes no distinction between obeying an untyrannical

government and a tyrannical one. (b) There are biblical examples of tyrannical governments in the Bible in which the Lord Jesus himself, his apostles, and other believers obeyed it.

(2) The right or the privilege to own certain property, such as firearms or anthrax for self-defense purposes, is a political matter, not an ethical, moral, or biblical matter which God has commanded or promised under the Fifth Commandment.

(3) Taking an action of self-defense against the government in which deadly force is to be used against the government is not something promoted, allowed, or defended by the Fifth Commandment. That is, a person could not claim that God would allow, promote, or defend such an action. Thus he would have no divine command or divine assurance from the Bible for such an action. On the contrary, in regards to political matters, such as the ownership of certain property, Scripture clearly has told us to obey the government, whether that government would be legal or illegal; whether that government would be tyrannical or not tyrannical.

(4) Tyrannical government, tyrannical laws, tyrannical citizens, and oppressive living conditions have been brought on and will only get worse because the American people have refused to repent of their sins and to believe God’s gospel promise of salvation. All of this evil has come upon this country because God is punishing this country for fighting against him. Moreover, if this would not stop, God will bring on a terrible war for the sole purpose of punishing this spiritual rebellion, rejection, and unfaithfulness.

See this! Repent and believe, pray and prepare for the days ahead!