

The Christian's Response to Political Activism

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Introduction:

Our current political climate has presented Americans with issues not faced for at least 200 years. The very foundations of our national identity and what America was **founded** to be have been changed and modified over the past one hundred years, leaving millions of Americans feeling that these united States are heading in the wrong direction. A mounting set of global philosophies and policies are being put into place which control our nation's future. Many believe these policies have gone beyond what the Constitution allows, and some believe things have gone too far to reverse.

Further, many conservative Christian churches and denominations see the new millennium as the initial stages of the biblical events surrounding the end of time as we know it. "End Times" messages are the norm in our Sunday services. The Tribulation is suggested as beginning either January 1st, 2000 or shortly thereafter. It has even been suggested that the Rapture of the Church will relieve Believers of the chore of planning and attending New Years Eve parties. Essentially, it is believed, these apocalyptic events do not allow for conservative Christians to involve themselves in political pursuits, and that these believers should not be pre-occupied with any matters that are not spiritual because the "time is so short."

In the 1980's, we saw the rise and fall of the Moral Majority. In the 1990's, we saw the rise and fall of the Christian Coalition. Both groups are still around, at least to some extent, but their effectiveness has dramatically diminished. Some conservative Christians have accused these groups of being outside the will of God. because of their activism. Both groups have been disavowed by many Christians as too political, and too involved in the worldly nature of modern existence. In addition, many Christian leaders have taken the position that political involvement has little or no spiritual validity, and absolutely no spiritual validity if that involvement brings out criticism, or worse, condemnation, of our current political leaders. Some of these spiritual leaders and Christians take these views based on their understanding of what it means to be "salt and light" in this world. Some have taken these positions because they believe the Christian's duty is to submit to our political leaders. This is usually interpreted to include submission to their plans, the laws

they pass for us to obey, even their political philosophies and where those philosophies are taking this great nation.

On the other hand, there is a growing group of believers who are facing their political leaders and calling them accountable to the Constitution and to the Bible. This group is vocal about the beginnings of this nation, its foundational beliefs and philosophies, and how far America has strayed from its intended form of government. This group is calling our political leaders to take America back to what the Founding Fathers envisioned. This new movement within conservative Christianity, which is really not a new movement at all but a resurgence of what most Christians believed more than a hundred years ago, claims that America was planned and blessed by God to be a unique nation, one which would be able to take the Christian gospel to all the world with a greater effect than ever before in history. In addition, these Christians hold that God blessed America with a greater freedom than any nation in history, which was intended by God to allow Christianity to grow and Christians to mature in ways simply not possible with other less free nations. These politically active Christians believe the Bible calls all believers to preserve God's intentions for this nation, or face His wrath.

In this essay, we will examine political activism in light of Biblical mandates on the conservative Christian. As previously stated, many in the conservative Christian community have, over the years, embraced a philosophy that allows minimal or no political views, or at least minimal or no resistance to political events and eventualities. This philosophy is usually expressed with claims that submission is the biblically mandated response to our government, its administrations and agencies. Further, it is claimed, those groups which espouse any form of resistance and even negative expressions toward the government, especially the federal government, are contrary to the Biblical mandates of submission to and support of the government, and are condemned by much of this group within the Body of Christ. The type of passive resistance advocated by Gandhi and King is condemned by these Christians as not being in submission to our government leaders. In this essay, we will discuss both groups of Christians, the politically submissive and politically active, and examine what the Bible has to say about both views.

A Call to Submission:

There are too many articles, and even books, written on this issue of submission to rulers that have been much more exhaustive in their research and their presentation than is possible in this short discussion. We won't attempt to repeat all of their views and

assertions in this short essay. But we will attempt to summarize some of the various arguments for and against political activism within the Body of Christ. In this essay, we will discuss, among other issues: submission to our governing authorities, support for our governing authorities, the Christian's responsibilities concerning stewardship, and the Christian responsibilities for self-determinism and even self-reliance. And we will try to do so in just a few short pages.

The first issue that seems to need examination is the entire concept of submission, with all its connotative meanings. If we perform a word search within the New International Version of the Bible, we find twenty-four references for the word "submit," six references for the word "submission," and forty-two references for the word "subject." Not all of these seventy-two references are specifically germane to the issues we are discussing here, but many of them are. Of greater importance, however, are the Hebrew or Greek words used which have been translated into the English words mentioned. Let us take a closer look at what is perhaps the most common of the Biblical passages used in this type of discussion. The reference is in Romans 13, and includes several verses. We will quote the first five verses of that chapter to give a more complete context.

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Romans 13:1-5, NIV

The common dictionaries tell us the English word "submit" means *to yield to governance or authority*. It can further mean to yield to any authority. The word "subject" means *to bring under (sometimes by force), or to make amenable to, the control, dominion or discipline of a superior*.

Further, these same dictionaries tell us the word "authority" means *power to influence or command thought, opinion or behavior, or a government agency or corporation to administer a revenue producing public enterprise*.

To get a more complete understanding of the words used here and their meanings, let's look beyond the common dictionaries of today and examine the actual Greek words used and what they meant to those reading the above passage in the first century.

The Authorized Version (King James) uses the words "subject yourselves." The Greek word is *hupotasso*, which means *to subordinate, be obedient to, put under, make subject to, to obey*.

These words and their definitions seem to leave little "wiggle room," but instead seem to demand total and complete obedience. The submission to which the Bible calls believers is apparently unconditional. In addition, there is in the passage itself the implied call not only submit to but to defend the authorities (the government) contained in the admonition that God established the authority in control. If God established the authority in control, then we as Believers are called upon to support and even defend that authority, assuming we want to be within the will of God and his clear, established direction.

So, at first glance, we can only conclude that those who resist America's federal (or any) government are outside the clearly established intentions of God. But to truly understand what Paul is telling us in this passage, we need to take a second, deeper look.

Submission to What?

These are strong words, suggesting that one must submit regardless of issues involved. But is that really what God is saying in these verses, and in others that say basically the same thing? Does God really demand total submission to the governing authorities and their actions and activities, their plans and programs? If there are any possible reservations to this apparent total demand, what are those reservations, and under what conditions may the thinking Christian feel free to resist authority?

If we were to stop with the conclusion stated a few paragraphs above, we would be correct, but we would be terribly incomplete. While we have examined the meanings of the words "submit" and "subject", and have discerned the meanings of those words to be clear and mandatory, we have not yet established the exact nature of that to which we are called to submit. Specifically, what did Paul actually mean when he called us to submit to our governing authorities?

The NIV used the phrase “*governing authorities*”; the Authorized Version used the phrase “*higher power*” or “*power*.” We need to examine the actual Greek words used and the meanings intended in order to understand that to which we are called to submit.

The Greek word used in the Romans 13 passage is “*exousia*”, which means *authority, jurisdiction or power*. Specifically, Paul is clearly calling Christians to submit to the authority that God established. But does this passage call us to submit to the actual individual or individuals temporarily in the position of power? This is an extremely important question, and I suggest that Romans 13, and other similar passages, call believers to submit to the authority, or the system of government, that God established, and not to the actual individuals temporarily in power, or to their actions and activities. This is a powerful claim, and requires substantial supporting evidence to be believed.

There are two sources of proof to this claim. First, we have a number of Biblical examples of individuals going against the established people temporarily in power, examples which carry no apparent condemnation in Scripture. Second, the foundational beliefs under which America was created establish this same principle very clearly.

Biblical examples of individuals going against authority, with no apparent condemnation, include but are not limited to:

1. the midwife who delivered Moses disobeyed Pharaoh and the law
2. the servant of Pharaoh's wife lied to her mistress
3. Rachael disobeyed the law and lied to those in authority
4. Rahab's very life disobeyed all moral laws and her actions in support of Joshua's spies broke existing political laws
5. Peter and John disobeyed the authorities and preached about Jesus anyway
6. Paul disobeyed the authorities, Greek and Roman, many times in his efforts to preach the gospel, for which he was often punished

The above examples do not carry with them any Biblical condemnation. In fact, most of these actions are praised later in Scripture.” In addition, there are many more examples of disobedience that are contained in Scripture, both Old and New Testament, and few if any of them carry any condemnation. So, does this mean that Paul is [demanding something which many Biblical characters, including Paul himself, found inconvenient? Or does this mean that Paul is demanding submission to the authority established by God, the authority which certain individuals seem to hold at any point in time? I suggest this

means that Paul was demanding absolute submission to the authority established by God, and not to any given individual who claimed to be in charge. Let's look at America, and what God ordained and established in the late 1700s. Let me start out with a story from history. Then we will come back to the Bible again.

A New World:

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there were thirteen colonies that were established by a nation far away. These colonies were inhabited by many of the most industrious individuals who formerly lived in that far-away nation. Truthfully, who would abandon that great society established over hundreds of years just to go to a far away land inhabited by dangerous animals and bloodthirsty natives? Who would leave their comfort and security to struggle in a land with few comforts and no security? Surely, only the most ambitious. And possibly the most dissatisfied.

The people left their comfort and security, survived a difficult voyage, established a tough life, worked hard, and saw their labor produce much fruit. Over the years, animal skins, meat, vegetables and grain were abundantly available, with much left over to ship back to the mother country. But some business leaders in control in that mother country were very greedy, and decided to get the governing leaders to pass laws that would create strong limitations on and requirements of those ambitious (or dissatisfied) settlers. So laws were passed that required that all goods and products produced in this difficult land had to be sold to large companies owned by these business leaders at a price fixed by these business leaders. These large companies would then ship the products back to the mother country to give the people at home first crack at buying these goods. What was left over could be shipped back to this new land to be purchased by the settlers at a much inflated price (to cover the costs of shipping and small corporate profits, you understand). Over time, more and more laws were passed that required the settlers to not sell or barter anything with their friends and neighbors, but sell everything they did not consume themselves to the big businesses owned by these rich business owners. As time went on, the politicians wanted their fair share of the money being produced in that productive land, so they passed new tax laws. Everything that was shipped to the mother country was already taxed as they were imported and as they were sold, but these new laws required taxes to be paid on all goods and services shipped back to and purchased in that new world by the settlers.

As you might imagine, the settlers would often ignore these new and difficult laws, and trade with their neighbors without first selling things to the big businesses and then buying things back from those businesses at an inflated and taxed price. The more trading

occurred between friends and neighbors, the higher became the fixed prices and the more taxes that were applied. Finally, there was virtually no product or service that could be traded in this new world without first being sold to the big businesses, shipped back to the home country, taxed, shipped back to the New World, and then resold to the settlers at a high fixed price and subject to additional taxes.

These ambitious and courageous individuals, the only types of people who would risk everything, including death, just for an opportunity to succeed; these individuals finally did what any thinking person would predict: they rebelled. The rebellion started with a tea party and ended with an eight year war.

At first, this was just a disagreement over pricing and taxes. As soon as the business leaders saw the possibility of their profits disappearing and the political leaders saw disobedience and insurrection, things escalated into a full scale war.

At the beginning of the protest (for that was all it started out to be!), some of the more learned men in these colonies got together and tried to provide some wisdom and insight for the colonies. As things grew worse, these men got together again and discussed "Where do we go from here?" They decided things had progressed to where further relations with the mother country were intolerable. So these men decided to create a new nation. They wrote their Declaration of Independence.

As these men considered what the new nation would look like and function like, they reviewed virtually every type of government in history. One point in common with almost every type of government known to man was the strong belief or assumption that all rights and authority rested in the leadership or rulership or kingship, and certain limited rights were granted to the people. As these men considered this new insight, they decided to try something that had never been attempted before in the history of mankind. They decided to create a nation based on the beliefs that:

1. all rights came from God, not from the leaders; and
2. all rights were given by God to individuals, not to governments; and
3. certain responsibilities and authorities were delegated to government, and **only** over those delegated responsibilities did the government have jurisdiction; and
4. all other rights not specifically delegated to the government were totally outside the authority or jurisdiction of that government

No such government in the history of mankind had ever been **founded**. No government ever believed that rights came from God and rested in mankind. No government ever faced the limitation that anything not explicitly delegated to the government was explicitly withheld from the government. No government ever allowed such total and unlimited freedom for its people, individual freedom that was limited only by God or by another individual's freedom. This was truly a new world!

These men who created this new nation, these Founding Fathers, all believed in these new concepts. They believed to the extent that almost all of them lost their entire fortunes, and most died, to give birth to this new nation. All of them believed that God was behind the creation of this new nation, although not all of them agreed totally with each other on the specific definition of that God. But they generally recognized that the God of the Bible was the author and creator of this new nation. And they all agreed that this God was leading the rebellion, the war and the birth of the new nation.

An interesting note as to the rebellion: at the beginning, before war actually broke out and when it was only a rebellion against unreasonable commerce controls and intolerable taxation, only about five per cent of the population was actually behind the rebellion. Another five per cent considered the rebellion itself to be treason. And about ninety per cent of the people were on the fence, wanting peace and accepting the status quo.

Those sitting on the fence condemned those they considered "activists" and claimed they were rebelling against God. Many sermons were delivered stating that these "activists" were not in submission to the government as God required and demanded in Romans 13 and other passages. America has always had its pacifists. America has always had its sincere believers who condemned political activism. America has always had its group of spiritual leaders who asked, "Can't we just get along?" America has always had its leaders who did not appreciate those who did not follow their leadership.

One man who was against the "activists" was a preacher. He used his pulpit to condemn many of these so-called rebels and became a powerful historical figure. He had no real church, but traveled from town to town looking for pulpits to preach from for a week or two at a time. He came into a small town one day and saw some men in the middle of the town square who had been beaten and tortured. When he inquired as to the reason for the torture, he was informed that these men were preachers who did not preach what the Church of England demanded. Since they preached other beliefs, they were punished. This man explored more fully, and was so stirred in his heart by what he discovered that he took up their defense in the established court. As an attorney under the authority of the British king, he had almost total freedom as to what he could say. And as a preacher, he gave a tremendous sermon, inciting the entire town to rebel against the tyranny of the British government. In his sermon delivered in court to the judge, this man uttered words

which would later become one of the most quoted phrases in our nation's history. He delivered his comments in defense of those preachers, but later he would deliver the same words to the leadership of what was to become our new nation. In his condemnation of the judge, the troops and the British government, this lawyer and preacher claimed that man must always be free to believe and to preach what he felt God gave him to preach, and should never be faced with the threat of violence or death. And when faced with the possibility of changing what God wanted a man to preach in order to live, this man, this lawyer, this preacher, this Patrick Henry, uttered his soon to be famous quote: "Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" The words of the sermon delivered before the British judge was to become the rallying cry for a new nation. When faced with submission to the British church, Patrick Henry knew what his Biblical response must be. Many months later, he delivered the most powerful speech the new nation's leadership ever heard, which included his now famous quote. His speech, delivered to a wavering and undecided American leadership, directly resulted in the declaration of war against England.

Patrick Henry knew what the Bible said about submitting to the governing authorities, and he knew when to resist.

The point of this history lesson, aside from reviewing facts that most Americans have forgotten or never learned, is to clearly establish exactly what "governing authority" God actually put in place over Americans. The governing authority that God established was a Constitutional Republic of limited government and maximum individual freedom, NOT a specific president or a specific elected representative, and certainly not what we have in Washington, D.C. today. According to most of the Founding Fathers, God authored the Constitution. And God gave all rights to mankind, and mankind, by way of the Constitution, delegated certain powers and limited authority to the federal government. In case some didn't understand the concept of limited delegation, the Founding Fathers stated it clearly in the Bill of Rights.

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Amendment 10, Constitution for the United States of America.

The government has only a few specifically delegated responsibilities in the Constitution, and outside of those limited responsibilities the federal government has nothing lawful to do. It cannot create for itself new powers or new responsibilities. It cannot create for Americans new programs that are based in powers or authorities not explicitly delegated to it by the Constitution. It cannot exceed its Constitutional limitations without losing its Constitutional authority and its justification for existence. Once the federal government

exceeds its Constitutional authority and limitations, it becomes unconstitutional and unlawful; a rogue government, outside of the control of the only Document that created it and gives it authority to exist.

More importantly, for every new power the government takes on, the rights of the people are reduced, wrongfully taken away. The government usurps what was given by God to the people every time it creates for itself a new role or a new responsibility. No government that wrongfully takes God-given rights from the people to whom God gave those rights can be viewed as being within the will of God. No government that wrongfully takes authorities or responsibilities upon itself that God did not write into the Constitution can consider itself to be anything but a rebellious and unlawful government. And no government official, elected or appointed, that continues to participate in this process of wrongfully taking on authorities and responsibilities that rightfully and Constitutionally belong to We The People can call himself or herself anything other than treasonous.

If God intended for America to have a certain specified government structure with certain specified limits on its authority to be run in a certain specific manner, and America evolves into something else by exceeding God's limits and usurping authority from the people, then that government MUST be brought back into conformity with what God originally intended.

And We The People are the only ones who can do that. It was to We The People that God granted all those rights. It was to We The People that God gave this great nation. It was to We The People that God gave this unique form of Government. And it was We The People that allowed the government to expand beyond its restrictions and become unconstitutional.

Therefore, it *must be We The People* who are charged with bringing America back to its roots, back within its limitations, back to what God created.

A Biblical Mandate:

Those of us who call ourselves Christian have allowed those who we appointed to guard our freedoms to instead usurp them. That which God gave to us, our rights and freedoms, have been wrongfully taken from us. God has charged all believers to be good stewards of everything he gives us. God gave us the rights and freedoms for specific reasons: to accomplish specific tasks for his Kingdom. Can we ignore this process of usurpation by our government any longer and still call ourselves good stewards? Can we accomplish for

God the tasks he designed and intended for us to accomplish unless we are good stewards of the tools which he expressly gave us? Can we allow this great nation, a gift from God, to be changed and modified to such an extent that it now barely resembles what God intended? Do we have any Biblical justification for allowing a small number of ambitious and greedy people to continue to pervert what God created? Can we sit still and keep our mouths shut while all this is going on, and still think we are following God? Can we continue to submit to this unconstitutional and ungodly federal government with no protest?

I think not!

I believe any Biblical understanding of the concept of stewardship requires all Believers to rise up and support a call to our government that it return to the Constitutional Republic established by God and by Godly men. *We cannot do otherwise. We must* submit to the authority appointed to us by God and demand that our government do the same. If we do not, history will condemn us, our Founding Fathers will condemn us, the Scriptures will condemn us, and God will condemn us.

"Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" Patrick Henry

Remember: God will not tolerate a complacent people. He told us that "judgment begins with the house of God." [1Peter 4:7]

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