

# Governing Authority

**Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.** (Romans 13:1-2)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In this study, I will attempt to demonstrate (as I understand it) what God expects of us regarding submitting to our governing authorities. I consider this to be important because I believe that much of what is taught by our Christian leaders, pastors, and teachers is not in accordance with Scripture on this subject. How many of us really believe, or understand, the introductory passage above from the book of Romans?

Judging from my own experiences and observations, as a believer who is a white American of European descent, it is probably true that American Christians *in general* are proud of our democracy and many believe that this nation has been especially blessed by God. I am not so naïve to not realize that this sentiment may not be as widely held among fellow brethren who are American people of color. This study is not about racism, but it is irresponsible not to consider the subject in the context of God's commands regarding our governing authorities and our daily lives (our walk) as children of God.<sup>2</sup>

Some Christian denominations and brethren believe and teach that we are the Israel of today, or at least that God is working out His will for the world through us as He did through Israel of the Bible. Therefore, it is believed that God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament apply to America today. For example, it is believed that if we as a nation *turn back to God* then He will bless us in the same manner that He promised to bless Israel (e.g., II Chronicles 7:14; Acts 3:19). Is this what the Bible says?

The purpose of this study is to examine what Scripture says about governing authority and how it applies to us today. Is our democratic form of government covered by Scripture, or is God working differently now than He did in times past? Can America claim the promises that God gave to Israel? Do believers in America have constitutional or Christian rights that we can claim to protect and promote our beliefs or to prevent persecution? I hope to show that these questions are directly applicable to our walk for God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Please keep in mind that this is directed to believers—children of God—and is not about changing how society views its government or God.

What do I mean by being a child of God? It is not about religious works or denominational affiliation—what we do to gain the favor of God—but about how the Almighty God sees us and what He has done for us. Briefly, here is the spiritual situation that applies to everyone on this earth, regardless of national origin, race, or culture:

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<sup>1</sup> All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB Side-Column Reference Edition, Copyright © 1996 by The Lockman Foundation)* unless otherwise noted. Nonbolded words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version (KJV)* or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

<sup>2</sup> See my study **No Room for Racism** that addresses the background for this statement.

- All people sin and need salvation from the consequences of our sin, which is judgment by God and eternity in hell (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15).
- To spare us His judgment, God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins (Romans 5:6-11).
- If we believe the gospel (good news) of our salvation, which is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up for us (I Corinthians 15:1-4), then God adopts us as His own children (Romans 8:12-17), He makes us members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27), and He considers us to be in Christ at His own right hand in the heavens (Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:4-6).<sup>3</sup>
- We are saved by the grace of God apart from any works of righteousness on our part (Romans 3:21-28; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- The moment we believe the gospel of salvation, we pass from spiritual death to eternal life in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-7; Romans 6:23; Titus 3:4-7). Furthermore, we can never lose our salvation because we are sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit and can never be separated from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39).
- Every believer is an ambassador for Christ—we are His representatives in this world (II Corinthians 5:20). We are, in effect, citizens of heaven and aliens in this world (Philippians 3:20-21).

So, if we recognize that we sin and simply believe the gospel of salvation, then we are children of God. There is nothing we can or should try to do to earn or guarantee our salvation because Christ did the work for us at the cross. Do you believe that Christ died for you?

**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**  
(Romans 6:23)

**Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

**In Him [Christ], you [believers] also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

**But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He [God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His [God's] grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** (Titus 3:4-7)

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<sup>3</sup> We receive many spiritual blessings by the grace of God at the moment we believe the gospel of salvation (Ephesians 1:3). See my studies **Salvation and Its Blessings, Our Lord Jesus Christ**, and others that identify some of those blessings.

Before going into the details of this study, I want to establish that I am an American citizen by birth. I am thankful to God that I can live in this country and enjoy the freedoms that come with citizenship. I have had the privilege of living in Indiana, Florida, Colorado, and Wyoming, as well as working or traveling in nearly every other state. Despite its faults, America is an amazing country and I do not have a desire to live in any other country. However, I do not worship America, and avoid boasting about my country at the expense of other countries.

Although America is not unique in its scope of constitutional freedoms, there are many countries in this world that do not provide the freedoms that we often take for granted. As a believer, however, I know that true freedom is not dependent on national origin or laws. All believers are spiritually free in Christ (Romans 8:1-2; Galatians 5:13; II Corinthians 3:17) and are citizens of heaven and, as such, we should not preoccupy ourselves regarding our political circumstances regardless of the country God has chosen to place us.

### **America is Not Spiritual Israel**

I was taught in church, directly and by inference, that America is spiritual Israel and God's chosen nation in this day. That is, American Christians can and should claim the promises that God gave to Israel. Brethren, it needs to be established upfront that America is not spiritual Israel nor God's chosen nation in this day. In fact, He has no chosen nation today, including the political State of Israel.

Regarding the claim that America will be blessed as promised if we turn back to God, we need to take a closer look at II Chronicles 7:14 and its context.

**If my people, which are called by my [God's] name, shall 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.** (II Chronicles 7:14—KJV)

It is not unusual to see the above verse referenced or fully written (usually in the *King James Version*) on highway billboards and on posters or hand-held signs at sporting and other events with substantial media coverage across the United States. The message that is sincerely trying to be conveyed is that if America returns to its Christian roots and obeys the commandments of God, then God will restore our land to Himself. Unfortunately, this and similar verses are being taken out of context and never were intended for anyone but the nation of Israel. It is using Scripture incorrectly and is seriously wrong.

There is a widely believed but gravely mistaken impression among many Americans, primarily believers and those who falsely profess to be Christians (through various denominational conceptions of Christianity or how to become a Christian), that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. This is the very heart of a long-standing evangelical or conservative Christian movement in this country currently referred to by some proponents as *Christian nationalism*.<sup>4</sup> Brethren, America never has been and never will be God's chosen nation or a Christian nation in any scriptural sense. Nor can we claim the promises that God gave to the nation of Israel.

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<sup>4</sup> I was first exposed to similar teaching propagated by the Christian organization *Moral Majority* in the late 1970s, but the same concepts go back to the time of the Puritans in New England, long before we were a sovereign nation, and later through the expansionist principles of *Manifest Destiny*.

In the above verse, the Lord God had appeared (by some means—a dream or vision) to King Solomon after Solomon had completed construction of the temple of God in Jerusalem. Israel was prosperous at the time, mostly because God was honoring His promises to the former King David, who was Solomon’s father (II Samuel 7:12-17; I Kings 2:1-4). God warned Solomon that if He had to punish the people of Israel and their land for their sins, He would forgive them and restore their land only if they humbled themselves before God and turned from their wicked ways (II Chronicles 7:11-14). In this communication from God, He was reiterating the promises and consequences associated with His requirement for full obedience to His entire covenant with Israel—the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 7:11-24; 8:6-10; 28:1-68; Leviticus 26:1-33).

Although Solomon was used mightily by God, he was disobedient and the people of Israel were disobedient (I Kings 11:9-13). Because of his disobedience, God divided Israel into two kingdoms during the reign of Solomon’s son and the nation was never restored. In accordance with prophecy, however, the nation will be restored in the future (after the rapture<sup>5</sup>). The tribes of Israel will be reunited by the will of God in the land that He promised them (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:15-28). Please read the referenced passages in Ezekiel (and related passages such as Jeremiah 31:31-34, Acts 3:17-26, and Hebrews 8:7-12), and it should be apparent that the Israel of today is not a fulfillment of those prophecies.

Brethren, it is very presumptuous—and wrong—to claim for ourselves the promises given exclusively to the nation of Israel. It is also presumptuous for us to think we can succeed where Israel failed. Furthermore, to claim these promises means that we would have to completely obey the entire Law of Moses. Trying to do so ignores the fact that we have a sin nature and will continue to sin (Romans 7:18-25), and nullifies the work of Christ at the cross for us. Most Christians do not fully understand that God figuratively nailed the Law of Moses to the cross with Christ—God took its requirements and condemnation out of our way (Romans 3:21-28; 6:14; 8:1-4; Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14).<sup>6</sup>

There is nothing about *Christian nationalism* that is in accordance with the will of God. The proponents of this movement do not obey the Law of Moses because they cannot do so (nor should they even try to do so). To try to get the rest of the country to be obedient to God (whether it be obeying the Ten Commandments, the entire Law of Moses, or the Bible as a whole) denies their own disobedience and is extremely hypocritical. God is not working through a nation or nations today but through individual believers regardless of the nation in which they live. Each child of God is an ambassador for Christ, representing Him in this sinful world.

God’s promises to Israel and prophecies concerning Israel were just that—they were to Israel and no other nation. No other nations can adopt or claim any of those promises for themselves. That God has not fulfilled all of His promises to Israel is due to their rejection of: God the Father by persecuting the prophets that He sent to them; the Lord Jesus Christ by demanding His crucifixion; and the witness of the Holy Spirit by stoning the disciple Stephen (Acts 2:1-8, 22-23; 3:13-15; 6:8-15; 7:51-60). Therefore, they rejected all three persons of the Godhead. Due to their unbelief, God temporarily (to this day and

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<sup>5</sup> The *rapture*, which is not called as such in the Bible, refers to the future event when all believers in this dispensation of God’s grace will be miraculously caught up to meet our Lord in the heavens (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; I Corinthians 15:50-53; Titus 2:11-14). See my studies **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** that describe the rapture.

<sup>6</sup> See my study **The Law of Moses** that explains God’s covenant with Israel and why the jurisdiction of the Law, including the Ten Commandments, does not apply to us today.

longer) blinded Israel and set them aside (Romans 11:25-29). He interrupted His prophetic plan and promises for His chosen nation to usher in the dispensation<sup>7</sup> of His grace through the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:1-12). Sometime after the close of this dispensation, which will end at the rapture, God will restore Israel to Himself and will fulfill all of His promises to that nation.<sup>8</sup>

**For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed [ignorant] of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening [blindness] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** (Romans 11:25)

Many of us tend to focus on the good of our country, and there is much that has been good here and in our efforts around the world. However, as with all nations, God uses our nation for purposes of honor *and* dishonor according to His eternal plan (Romans 9:19-24). An unbiased assessment of our history will reveal how imperfect (and, in truth, ungodly) our nation actually has been and continues to be. Please reflect on the following excerpts of our history.

- According to our Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal.” Unfortunately, however:
  - *All men* did not include women.
  - *All men* did not include the native Americans, African Americans (most of whom were slaves and not considered to be Americans), or any people of non-European descent. Perhaps, and I am only guessing, the phrase meant that European American men were just as equal to the task of self-government as British men.
- Apparently, most of our founding fathers were Freemasons and not godly Christians as many would like to believe. Masonry is a religion (members meet at a temple), and Masons worship the god of all religions. The *God* invoked by our founding fathers was a god of their imagination and not the Almighty God (Colossians 2:18-23; II Corinthians 4:3-4). They used some concepts from the Bible in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but the same can be said for the governing documents of many countries.
- We have the constitutional freedom to worship whomever or whatever we please. Because anything or everything is worshiped by our citizens, America may be one of the most pagan countries in the world.
- We have a long history of racism and bigotry, both of which continue to be common in our society and culture as it seems to be in most (perhaps all) countries.

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<sup>7</sup> The word *dispensation* is not a theological term applied by Bible scholars but rather it is just an old English word used in the KJV and used only in Paul’s letters (I Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; Colossians 1:25). Other versions translate the Greek word as *stewardship*, *administration*, *trust* or *trusteeship*, and *commission*. The Bible also uses the similar words *ages* and *generations* to describe how God is dealing with the world at different times (Ephesians 2:7; 3:5, 21; Colossians 1:26). In simple terms, a dispensation covers a period of time during which God is administering His plan in a particular way. We are currently in the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:1-12; Acts 20:24).

<sup>8</sup> See my studies **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** and **The Law of Moses** that explain why Israel is not God’s chosen nation today and address the future fulfillment of God’s prophetic plan for Israel.

There appears to be a severe lack of scriptural understanding and humility regarding how Christians view our country. Instead of trying to get our nation to humble itself before God, we need to take a candid look at ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

### **Governing Authorities are Established by God**

In an effort to claim some of the promises to Israel, a belief propagated by Christian political organizations, and some Christian colleges, denominations, churches, and individual brethren is that the key to national repentance is voting in the right leadership. By doing so, it is thought that America will return to God and be blessed accordingly, and that Christian persecution and the erosion of our perceived *Christian rights* will subside or cease. In other words, the thinking is that God has left it up to us—made it our responsibility—to make sure the right people are in office. Is this viewpoint supported by Scripture?

**Every person [believer—Romans 1:7] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities [higher powers]. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance [commandment] of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.**  
(Romans 13:1-7)

**Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution [ordinance of man], whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves [servants] of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood [fellow believers], fear God, honor the king.** (I Peter 2:13-17)

Consider the political environment under which Paul and Peter wrote these passages according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (i.e., they wrote the word of God and not their own thoughts or reasonings—II Timothy 3:16-17; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 1:20-21). Israel was a conquered colony of the Roman Empire. As with most of its colonies, Rome allowed the people of Israel to retain their form of leadership, but the leadership was subservient to the authority in Rome. Therefore, Judea still had a Jewish king, though approved or appointed by the Roman Senate. However, Judea was governed by a governor of Rome (Pontius Pilate during the time of Jesus' crucifixion and later Felix and Festus—Matthew 27:11-14; Acts 23:23-24; 24:27) who answered directly to the Roman emperor or Caesar. Herod (known historically as Herod the Great and later as Herod I) was King of Judea during the time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1), and Paul made his defense before King Agrippa (Acts 25:23 – 26:32; also

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<sup>9</sup> See my study **Let Us Be Humble** that examines God's expectation and our need to be humble.

known historically as Herod Agrippa II). These were the governing authorities—the Caesar of the Roman Empire, the Roman governor over the region that included Judea, and the Jewish King of Judea—that both Paul and Peter referred to and instructed the brethren to be in subjection to.

All those in authority, whether President, Governor, Mayor, Prime Minister, Chairman, Chancellor, Generalissimo, King or Queen, Czar, Emperor, Caesar, Pharaoh, etc. (and, yes, even Führer), are in authority by the will of God—He uses them for His purpose (Romans 9:14-21; Psalm 103:19; Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 4:34-35). Christians may think we have the responsibility and power to put *our man* or *God's man* (or woman) in office, but what makes us more politically influential in accomplishing the will of God than believers who live in nondemocratic countries, whose leaders are also in power by the will of God? We must be careful who we support and why, because God may have planned to place our choice in authority for the purpose of dishonorable use or as a vessel of wrath (Romans 9:21-22; Proverbs 16:4).

**What shall we say then? There is no injustice [unrighteousness] with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use [honour] and another for common use [dishonour]? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among the Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Romans 9:14-24)**

As for turning our nation back to God, brethren, America has never been a godly nation. Israel was rarely godly, but the nation was chosen by God as His nation and He will eventually restore Israel to Himself. He will miraculously *cause* them to see their sinfulness and to repent of their sins, and the believing remnant will inherit the kingdom that God promised them long ago (Zechariah 12:10-14; Ezekiel 36:22-38; 37:21-28; Acts 3:17-26). America has no such promises from God. God will install the leaders of His choice, regardless of how believers vote or encourage others to vote, and His sovereign purpose will be fulfilled. All believers who are in a position of political authority should be humbled by this truth.

### **What Does Being Subject to Our Governing Authorities Mean?**

As with everything else regarding our daily walk as God's children—members of the body of Christ—God did not leave it to our imagination to figure out what He meant by us being subject to our governing authorities.<sup>10</sup> According to Romans 13:1-7:

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<sup>10</sup> See my study **Walk Worthy** that demonstrates how God has told us the manner in which He expects us to live each day.

- We are to be in subjection to our governing authorities or higher powers.
- There is no authority except from God, and those that exist are established by God (see also Colossians 1:16-17; Psalm 103:19).
- Those who resist authority have opposed the authority of God and will receive condemnation upon themselves (see also Exodus 22:28).
- Those in authority are ministers or instruments of God. They are avengers who bring wrath upon those who practice evil.
- We are to be in subjection because of wrath and for conscience' sake. That is, we should do what is good or right; doing what is wrong (e.g., breaking the laws of our government) results in punishment.
- We are to render to all what is due them: taxes (see also Luke 20:19-26), custom, fear (respect), and honor.

Additionally, according to I Peter 2:13-17:

- We are to submit ourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution whether it be a king or a governor sent by the king (in our case, the hierarchy of authority is our president, governor, and mayor or equivalent).
- Submitting ourselves to those in authority is according to the will of God and is the right thing to do.
- We are to *act* as free people (regardless if we are politically free or not) in the service of God; we are not to use our freedom in Christ as a covering or excuse for doing what is wrong (see also Galatians 5:1, 13).
- We are to honor all people (including those in positions of authority), love our fellow brethren, and fear God (i.e., be in submission to Him because He is the sovereign Almighty God and is greater than all human authority).

Neither political nor personal freedom is an issue with God. As noted earlier, all who are saved are free in Christ. We are free from the bondage of the Law of Moses and are one in Christ, whether slave or free, Jew or Gentile, or male or female (Galatians 3:10-14, 27-28; 5:1; I Corinthians 12:12-13). We should not seek to be politically or personally free; the people of Israel were not free during the time of Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Instead, we are exhorted to be content in our circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:6-8). If we are offered or given our freedom, however, we should take it (I Corinthians 7:21-24).

We are to obey our local, state, and federal laws. Most laws are for our good. Although I might be wrong, I am not aware of any current laws in America that *cause* or *force* a person to sin. However, for us to exercise the benefit of every law is not right, and some nations do have laws that, if exercised or obeyed, are sinful. For example:

- Lawsuits are legal, but we should not sue others (I Corinthians 6:1-8).
- Getting drunk is legal (over a certain age), but we are not to get drunk (Ephesians 5:18).
- Being sexually immoral is legal in most cases, but we are to flee immorality (I Corinthians 6:18).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See my study **Abortion** that addresses sexual immorality and what God expects of us regarding sex.



- Laws of prejudice should not be exercised to our advantage or to the detriment of someone else (Galatians 3:27-28; Romans 12:1-3, 16).

### **Should We Always Obey Our Governing Authorities?**

We, as members of the body of Christ, are subject to our governing authorities. In fact, all believers of all time have been subject to their governing authorities. God has established the authorities for our good and to administer His wrath. God wants us to render to our authorities what is due to them. However, does God desire that we do *everything* that our authorities desire or demand? What if we are required to do something wrong—something that is contrary to the will of God as revealed to us in Scripture? We must do what is right and accept the consequences without crying out *Injustice!* or *Persecution!*

There are examples in Scripture where God’s people were honored by God for disobeying their governing authorities, including the following:

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down to the idol of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon knowing that they would be cast into a blazing furnace if they did not do so. They did not know that God would miraculously keep them from harm (Daniel 3:8-30).
- Daniel prayed to God contrary to a law of King Darius of Babylon and was cast into a lion’s den. He did not know that God would miraculously keep him from harm (Daniel 6:1-28).
- Peter and John defied the Jewish religious leaders when ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:1-20). Although the religious leaders did not have governing authority, they had the authority to turn them over to the Roman government as they did with Jesus and later with Paul. Furthermore, it is most likely that Peter and John would have defied Roman authorities had they been given the same order by them.

Consider the time of Nazi Germany (1933 – 1945). Laws and directives were instituted to persecute Jews and other people considered to be unacceptable for various reasons by the government. Those who did not expose their neighbors, and those who hid their neighbors (or even complete strangers) from the authorities, faced imprisonment, were sent to forced-labor camps, and/or were tortured or executed for their crimes against the government. These consequences often applied to relatives of the *law breakers* regardless of their involvement.

As believers, we should consider what we would have done under those circumstances. Would we have complied with the law, or would we have done the right thing despite the consequences? Unfortunately, these things are happening in parts of the world today and, at some point, this may not be a hypothetical question even in America (I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5). Brethren, would we try to protect a Jew, Muslim, homeless person, drug addict, homosexual person, physically or mentally impaired adult or child, or whatever other type of person the government may decide is unacceptable (Luke 5:27-32; Romans 13:8-10; I Corinthians 10:23-24; Galatians 5:13-14)? I hope I would, despite the consequences.

### **Resisting Our Governing Authorities**

Although believers have God’s authority to disobey laws that are contrary to the written will of God as noted above, do we have the right to challenge or fight against our governing authorities? Please recall the passages in Romans 13 and I Peter 2. According to those two passages, we have no directive

from God or supporting Scripture to resist our governing authorities because they are in power according to His will. Claiming it as our Christian right or responsibility to do so would be taking the name of God in vain—it is contrary to the will of God. Please consider the following examples from Scripture about obeying those in authority.

### ***David and King Saul***

David and King Saul had an incredibly complex relationship. At times, Saul had David play a harp to soothe him (I Samuel 16:14-23). At other times, because of his jealousy, Saul actively sought David's death (I Samuel 18:6-11, 17; 19:1). Although Saul most likely was not saved (I Samuel 16:14-15), he was anointed as King of Israel by God and David understood this (I Samuel 9:15-17; II Samuel 1:14-16).

Consequently, David did not, as one might have thought he would, try to overthrow Saul or try to kill him in response to the unjust treatment by Saul. When Saul was mortally wounded in battle yet still lived, he requested another man to kill him. David subsequently held that man accountable for killing the king (II Samuel 1-16). In his obedience to God, David understood that it was not up to himself or any other man to remove Saul from his God-appointed position.

### ***Daniel***

Because of Israel's disobedience to God, God worked through the Babylonians to subdue the nation of Israel (II Kings 24:10 – 25:21). Many of the Israelites from Jerusalem and Judah were transported to Babylon as slaves (II Chronicles 36:15-21). Some of them, including Daniel, were found to have skills beneficial to their captors and were put to work for the kings and kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 1:1-21). They did not seek or apply for the work but were appointed to positions of authority by their captors.

With positions of trust in the ungodly kingdom, one might think that Daniel and other Israelites would have done whatever was necessary to resist the Babylonians so that they could return to Israel. They did not do this, however. In due time, according to God's plan as prophesied by Jeremiah, the Israelites were released and returned to their own land (II Chronicles 36:22-23).

### ***Jesus, Peter, and Paul***

During the time of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, the Caesar of Rome was the supreme authority over an empire that encompassed the Mediterranean region, and his governors were his representatives in the Roman colonies (including Israel). None of them complained about the injustices or exhorted the brethren to rise up against Roman authority. As we know, Jesus did not even defend Himself before the Roman governor (Pontius Pilate) because He knew that God was working out His will through the religious leaders of Israel and the Roman government (Mark 15:1-5; Acts 4:27-28).

When Paul stood before Judea's King Agrippa in his defense against false accusations, he did not plead for mercy for himself. Instead, he used the opportunity to speak the truth regarding Christ (Acts 26:19-29). Furthermore, during his imprisonment in Rome, many people within the household and among the personal guard of the Caesar were saved through Paul's teaching and testimony of faith (Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22). There is no hint in Scripture, however, of Paul encouraging those people (or anyone else) to rise up against the Caesar or his government despite the terrible persecution against believers in Roman-controlled cities (Philippians 1:27-30; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:1-2, 14-16).

### ***Moses—An Exception***

According to God's purpose and plan, the people of Israel resided in Egypt for 430 years and were slaves to the Pharaohs for much of that time (Exodus 1:8-14; 12:40-41). Moses had been raised by the daughter of the Pharaoh of his day. This was part of God's plan, and He used Moses to request that Pharaoh let the people of Israel go. The Pharaoh resisted, in part because he would lose a workforce of a vast number of enslaved people (Exodus 1:7-10; 5:4-5). However, God worked through Moses to bring His people out of Egypt to eventually settle in the land that God had promised to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:23-24; 3:6-8).

Moses, therefore, stood up to the Pharaoh and disobeyed his orders to stay in Egypt. Was Moses wrong in doing this? In this case, no. God specifically revealed His will to Moses and worked many miracles through Moses (to the detriment of the Pharaoh and his people—Exodus 7 – 11; 14:13-31) to provide a miraculous means of escape for the people of Israel. God worked things out according to His predetermined plan through both Moses and the Pharaoh (Exodus 9:12-17; Romans 9:16-18). We, however, are to be in subjection to our governing authorities. This is God's revealed will to us in this time of His administration of grace, so we are in no position to rise up against our governing authorities as Moses did.

### ***What About America?***

According to this perspective, we should humbly consider our early American history. During the American revolution, George III, King of Great Britain and Ireland, was the supreme authority over the American colonies. Should believers have participated in the revolution against England? Not according to Scripture because revolution is the opposite of subjection. Nor does Scripture provide a supporting argument that believers should have fought for the British against their own friends and neighbors. They were under British authority and were to render what was due to them. Later, they were under American authority and were to render what was due to them. Rendering all that is due, however, has never included sinning at the request or direction of our government. Both governments were established by God and He used them for His purposes. It was not up to believers to decide for God what He was doing.

### **Leave Justice and Retribution to God**

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:14-21).**

It is hard to imagine anyone liking to be persecuted for anything. For many of us, being persecuted for our faith, or if we perceive that we are being persecuted for our faith, seems to be particularly onerous. What many of us do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that we should consider suffering

for Christ as a blessing. Instead, oftentimes our first reaction is to fight back or seek justice. This response, however, is contrary to the above passage.<sup>12</sup>

**Blessed are you when people insult [revile] you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me [Christ]. (Matthew 5:11)**

It is not uncommon for American brethren to feel that our Christian rights are being taken away from us and that our government (at all levels) is persecuting us through various laws and ordinances. Is this really true? We need to understand what Scripture says about persecution and then examine ourselves to evaluate whether our persecution is based on living in accordance with God's will, or if it is brought upon ourselves by our own thoughts and actions that are not scripturally sound (I Peter 4:15-16, 19). Please consider the following examples of perceived, but false, persecution:

- Do we feel persecuted when laws require the removal of displays of the Ten Commandments? Brethren, we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under grace—the Law was nailed to the cross. We should not expect the world to live according to laws that God has taken out of our way.
- Do we feel persecuted when laws prevent us from praying in our public schools? Brethren, do we really want anyone being able to publicly pray to any god? We need to remember that our prayers are between us and God and that we can pray in our hearts and minds anywhere and anytime of the day (Matthew 6:5-6; I Thessalonians 3:9-10).
- Do we feel persecuted if Christmas cannot be observed as Christ's birthday in our public schools, or if we are not allowed to say *Merry Christmas* in various public settings? First of all, brethren, the date of Christ's birth is unknown, and His birthday was never celebrated in Scripture. Furthermore, because we are no longer under the Law of Moses, there are no longer any holy days (holidays), months, seasons, or years for us to observe in our worship of God (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17).
- Do we feel persecuted if our state or local government temporarily forbids church services for health reasons as it did during the COVID-19 pandemic? Brethren, the mandates (laws) were not targeting our faith—they included all gatherings over specific numbers of people in enclosed spaces and were temporary.

Regarding the last point, although fellowship is important for many reasons, we do not need a physical church building or a large gathering to worship God. For example, Paul worshiped and ministered while in prison (Acts 16:22-30; Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22), and he referred to churches that met in private homes (Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). A small Bible study group, therefore, meets the scriptural definition of a church. However, if our government made a law forbidding our worship of God (such as when Daniel broke the law by praying), then that would be contrary to the will of God (Hebrews 10:23-25; see also Acts 4:18-20). In such a case we may need to find some means to worship contrary to the law, fully knowing and accepting the consequences if discovered.

Brethren, it is a promise that if we live godly lives in Christ, in accordance with the truth of the word of God, that we will be persecuted. Instead of seeking justice when we are persecuted, we are exhorted

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<sup>12</sup> See my study **Christian Suffering** that investigates suffering for Christ and how God expects us to respond to persecution.

to bless those who persecute us and respond to them with acts of goodness (Romans 12:20-21; I Thessalonians 5:15). God knows what is going on, and we are to leave justice and retribution to Him (Romans 12:17-19). Therefore, it not up to us, as believers, to stand up to our government and fight for our presumed Christian rights. In truth, we do not have Christian rights. We are citizens of heaven and aliens on this earth. This is an evil age and there are no godly governments—we only have worldly governments (Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-3).

**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** (II Timothy 3:12)

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.** (Romans 12:14)

## Personal Thoughts

### Background

As one who has lived through the times of the cold war (under the threat of nuclear war), the civil rights movement, multiple wars (e.g., Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan), and numerous other significant national and world events—both good and bad—I have developed my own thoughts as a believer regarding how I ought to respond to my own government and how to view the worldwide system of governments. I try to frame my response according to my understanding of Scripture and, frankly, some of my thoughts have changed over the years as my understanding has hopefully grown. Some of those changes occur by observing and evaluating how fellow believers respond to our government and these events. Are their responses supported by Scripture or do I need to differ from my fellow brethren despite the consequences to our friendship or fellowship?

The following discussions are presented for your consideration. They are not offered as judgment or for the sake of debate. I only ask that you evaluate them in accordance with Scripture from the perspective as being a member of the body of Christ.

### Political Affiliation

Brethren, we are in the world but not of it (John 17:11-14; Romans 12:1-2; I Corinthians 3:18-23; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20-21). All authority is of God or was brought into being by God, but no nation on earth is godly. Paul was a Jew *and* a Roman citizen by birth and used his heritage to his advantage to preach Christ, even to the highest authorities including the King of Judea and Roman governors (Acts 24 – 26). We also know that Paul stood before the Caesar (Acts 26:30-32; 27:23-24; 28:19; Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22), but we have no record of what he said to him.

Despite his Roman citizenship, however, Paul never said that the Roman government was good and should be supported beyond obedience to its laws. Nor did he say that it was bad and that the brethren should rise up together to make their voice heard in order to change things. This was in spite of him being falsely imprisoned in Rome and ultimately being put to death (II Timothy 4:6-8). It is good to remember that Paul's letter to the Philippian brethren, often considered to be the book of joy, was written while Paul was in a Roman prison (Philippians 1:7, 12-14).

Today, many brethren in America (as well as those who falsely profess to be Christians), believe they can and should influence their government and its laws. This is done through voting and by supporting

Christian political interest groups and various candidates with their time and money. Is this really how God wants us to spend our time and money so graciously provided to us?

Think about it, brethren. Today, one could easily conclude (as emphasized by evangelical and conservative Christian organizations) that the only good Christian in America is a Republican. However, an unknown percentage of American brethren are registered as Democrats, Independents, other parties, or as unaffiliated voters. Further still, there are some brethren (a likely very small minority) who are not registered to vote or, if they are, choose not to vote for their governing authorities because they know God will put His choice into office to fulfill His purpose. Please do not judge those brethren who are in the latter category.

Brethren, I fall into this category. I voted as a registered Republican for the Republican candidate for president in the 1976 election (Gerald Ford)—it was the first time I was eligible to vote. At about the same time I was beginning to understand the magnitude of the sovereignty of God, though not yet realizing that He puts into power His choice regardless of a country's form of government (such things were not taught in the churches I attended). Soon afterward, I was heartbroken (as was my pastor who was unaware of the internal political strife—he never preached about politics during the years I attended) when an exemplary couple in our church was ostracized by fellow church members and ended up leaving because it became known that they voted Democrat (for Jimmy Carter—a professing Christian—who won). I no longer wanted any political affiliation and stopped voting to fill positions of authority.

I did not vote again for a position of authority until 2020 when I voted as an unaffiliated voter against the incumbent president (Donald Trump). I did so not to affect the outcome but in support of those close to me. I did not want to be identified with the majority of Christians (most of whom identified themselves as evangelical or conservative Christians) who I was convinced were supporting an exceptionally arrogant, immoral, and blasphemous man who gladly accepted the worshipful adoration of his followers and who gave a self-serving pledge to champion *Christian* causes. However, I still firmly believe that all who are in a position of political authority are in power by the will of God. Consequently, I have returned to my post-1976 election conviction to not vote for positions of authority, acknowledging God's sovereign will and accepting the judgment of those who do not agree with my stand.

### **Patriotism—At What Cost?**

Generally speaking, most of the concepts of America's guiding documents are good, and America has been the dream or destination of many people around the world who are oppressed in their native countries. However, is there really any spiritual justification for patriotism among believers? Should we vow to do anything and everything expected or demanded by our country? Should we involve ourselves in the political process of our country? According to my own observations, most American brethren would say a resounding "Yes!" to these questions. Remember, however, that we are not of this world; instead, we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). We were spiritually changed from death to life, so we are no longer considered by God to be citizens of this world (Ephesians 2:1-7).

With this in mind, does God expect us to give our oath of allegiance to an earthly institution? Think about the words of the *Pledge of Allegiance* the next time you recite it, with your hand over your heart. Is doing this a form of worship? I believe that it is. Please check *United States Code, Title 4, Chapter 1*,

*Section 8(j)* where it is stated that our flag is “considered a living thing.” Is this really something that God wants believers to do (I Corinthians 8:1-6; 10:14; II Corinthians 6:14-18)? Would you make the same type of national pledge regardless of the country in which you are a citizen? These are all important questions that every believer should ponder.

Even though we could look at many examples regarding the dangers of patriotism, please indulge me while I refer to Nazi Germany again. I use Nazi Germany as an example because it quickly went from a democracy to a dictatorship, and any country, regardless of their current form of government, could become authoritarian like Nazi Germany.

During the 1932 federal democratic election, Hitler’s Nazi Party received the votes needed to become a partner in the German government. Hitler was appointed as Chancellor by President Hindenburg in 1933, and subsequently was able to convince the elected legislature of Germany to outlaw all other parties and to give him greater power than normal through the *Enabling Act* (among other things, he combined the positions of President and Chancellor). With Hindenburg’s death in 1934, Hitler assumed the position of dictator, or *Führer*. It was not long before the majority of Germans looked upon him as their national savior. In truth, their salute to him was a form of idol worship.

Based on the passage in Romans 13 and numerous examples throughout the Bible, the progression of events that put Hitler into power were in accordance with the sovereign will of God.<sup>13</sup> Even though God planned it all out, the people who voted Hitler into power, probably including some believers, were responsible for what followed. How is it possible that we can be held responsible for something God already planned to occur? Please carefully consider the following message by Peter to the people of Israel at the time of Pentecost.

**Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22-23)**

As stated in this passage, Peter, through whom the Holy Spirit was speaking, held the people of Israel responsible for turning Jesus over to the Romans and for His crucifixion even though these events were in accordance with God’s predestined plan (see also Matthew 27:24-25; Acts 4:27-28). Therefore, no one can say “I am not responsible if God planned it to occur” (see also Romans 9:14-21).

The German citizens who voted for Hitler and his Nazi Party had no idea how things would turn out—that their government would be as destructive and as murderous as it was, and that Germany would be in ruins a little more than a decade later and then be split into two nations. In the meantime, the vast majority of German citizens trusted Hitler and patriotically served and fought for him and the nation until total defeat in 1945.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, consider the Pharaoh in Moses’ day (Exodus 9:12-17; Romans 9:17), King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 4:28-37), and King Sennacherib of Assyria (II Kings 19:8-37) who were in power and used by God for His purposes. Also, we already know that there will be specific evil people referred to as *the beast* and *the false prophet* in the future and that they will be in power to fulfill the prophecies of God regarding His judgment of the nations (Revelation 13:1-10; 19:20).

If you were a German citizen and a believer during that time, what would you have done? Would you have been a good patriot and served Hitler's Germany or would you have suffered the consequences for living in accordance with your salvation in Christ? What about if you were a believer and citizen of Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, etc.? Would you patriotically support or fight for your country's causes? American Christians should think about these things as they consider their own patriotism. This is not about being anti-government, for we are commanded to submit to our government as long as it is not forcing us to sin.

Because we are to submit to our governing authorities, it is not up to us to participate in demonstrations or revolutions against our government. I believe it is a different matter to stand, through peaceful means, with or for family, friends, or neighbors who are suffering unjustly. As an example, Paul was saddened that none among his fellow brethren came to his defense before the Roman authorities (II Timothy 4:16-17). *However*, we need to be very careful to avoid conforming with the world (Romans 12:1-2) or associating with, or standing for, activities or causes that are sinful or participating in demonstrations that become sinful (which often occurs through the words or actions of one or both sides).

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves and consider their interests above our own (Romans 13:8-10; Philippians 2:3-4; Galatians 6:9-10),<sup>14</sup> but God has not instructed us to try to change the world (because it is ungodly—Romans 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:12-14; II Corinthians 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-3). We are instructed, however, to live quiet lives (I Thessalonians 4:9-12) and to flee from sin and the appearance of evil (II Timothy 2:20-26; I Thessalonians 5:21-22). We can do these things, and we can live according to the fruit of the Spirit, regardless of our government or its laws (Galatians 5:22-23).

### **Constitutional Rights and Christian Rights**

All American believers have constitutional rights due to their citizenship. The U.S. Constitution, however, was not, and still is not, a perfect document. As noted earlier, the phrase "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence did not actually mean *all people*. An equal rights amendment was not introduced in Congress until 1923 and was not passed by Congress until 1972. However, it still has not been fully ratified by the states and added to the Constitution.

American Christians often equate Christian rights with Constitutional rights. Brethren, the Constitution most definitely is *not* a sacred document. It is the word of men and not the word of God. For one example of many, the clause for religious freedom in the first amendment is contrary to the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-11). Also, as noted earlier, just because the Constitution (and laws that enforce the Constitution) allows people to do certain things does not mean that we, as believers, should take advantage of all the rights afforded to us.

Brethren, I submit that believers do not have Christian rights. There are many things God wants us to do in our worship of Him and to walk worthy of our salvation in Christ. However, the Bible does not say that these things should or will be supported by the laws of man. If a law forbids us to pray to God or to worship Him, then we would need to pray or worship in secret. If we were to be exposed for breaking the law, then we would need to face the consequences of the law quietly and humbly as part of our

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<sup>14</sup> See my study **Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves** that examines this command of God.



suffering for Christ. We have no Scriptural justification for claiming, before the courts of man, that the laws are contrary to our right to pray to, or worship, God.

Some constitutional rights seem to be particularly precious to many Christians, and much effort is expended by Christian organizations and individual believers to ensure that these rights are upheld. We will look at some rights that I have found many fellow believers to be passionate about.

### ***Freedom of Religion***

Among other things, the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides for freedom of religion and forbids the establishment of a national religion. It is a good thing that we do not have a national religion, because no nation would choose to worship according to the word of God in general or the gospel of grace in particular. It is also a good thing that members of the body of Christ can freely and openly worship in most parts of the country (this is discouraged or illegal, however, in some Native American nations, tribes, and pueblos within America).

As mentioned earlier, however, this amendment provides the freedom to worship anyone or anything a person pleases. The Constitution does not give precedent or advantage to *Christianity*. Consequently, Christians have no constitutional right to assert our beliefs over those of anyone else. Furthermore, as noted earlier, to claim that we have the constitutional right to publicly pray or observe holidays in the way we choose opens the door for every religion to do so. There are countries that have national religions and restrict how people can worship. We should be thankful for the freedoms we have and not abuse them or act arrogantly.

Brethren, we need to remember that we are free in Christ regardless of our political circumstances. We do not need constitutional rights or provisions to believe the gospel of salvation, worship God, and live each day (walk worthy) in response to the gift of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12). There are no laws against living according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh (Galatians 5:16-25). If we suffer because we are living for Christ, we will not be the first to do so. Furthermore, God considers such suffering to be a blessing (Matthew 5:11; Philippians 1:27-30; I Peter 4:15-16).

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** (Galatians 5:22-23)

### ***Freedom of Speech***

The 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment also provides for freedom of speech. For many Christians, this is tied to our freedom of religion. Any restriction (real or perceived) of our ability to publicly worship as we please is often considered to be a breach of our constitutional rights—our Christian rights. There is even a Christian college dedicated to training up Christian lawyers to fight for our Christian rights and to influence our judicial system and government in accordance with the laws of God. Again, where in Scripture does it say that we have Christian rights or that we have a responsibility to sue or fight for them? Scripture does say, however, that we are not to sue anyone (I Corinthians 6:1-11).

**Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.** (I Corinthians 6:7-8)

It is not uncommon for Christian organizations, churches, and individual believers to speak out against certain sinful behaviors (or behaviors or actions perceived to be against the will of God) as an exercise of their freedom of speech. We must remember that all the exhortations in Scripture to live godly lives are written to children of God and not to the world (Romans 6:8-14; 12:1-2). No one can live, or even attempt to live, according to God's will without first being saved (Romans 8:5-8; I Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:12-14).

We are not here to change the sinful behaviors of nonbelievers but to represent Christ as His ambassadors. As an analogy, American ambassadors to foreign countries represent our government in those countries—they are not tasked with turning the citizens of those countries into Americans. Trying to change the behavior of nonbelievers exposes the extent of our own hypocrisy or ignorance. Please consider the following examples regarding fellow brethren and those who claim to be Christians:

- How many who try to overturn abortion laws have participated in premarital sex (fornication) or extramarital sex (adultery) or continue to do so, or were the illegitimate father leading to an abortion?
- How many who try to prevent or overturn laws pertaining to homosexual rights have been sexually immoral in any way or continue to be immoral? God abhors all sexual sin (Romans 1:26-27; 13:9; I Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20; Galatians 5:19; I Thessalonians 4:3-7). We should be thankful that God is forgiving and that we, in this dispensation of grace, are not under the penalties required by the Law of Moses (e.g., Leviticus 20:10-13).
- How many who try to prevent or overturn laws pertaining to legalization of behavior-altering drugs have abused drugs (illegal or prescription) or alcohol or continue to do so?
- How many who want laws to allow prayer in public schools or before athletic events or public meetings would want a person of a non-Christian religion to lead the prayer?
- How many who oppose vaccinations or health-related mandates for *religious* reasons have ever gone to a doctor, surgeon, dentist, or chiropractor, or used prescription or over-the-counter drugs or medications to get well?
- How many who demand the death sentence for murder, because God required it in the Law of Moses, have wished that someone who wronged them was dead (see Matthew 5:21-22)? Furthermore, have they done any of the other things that required punishment by death under the Law of Moses? For example, have they disobeyed a requirement of the Sabbath day (Exodus 31:15), cursed or struck a parent (Exodus 21:15, 17), committed adultery (Leviticus 20:10), or committed a homosexual act (Leviticus 20:13)? Thankfully, we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses.
- How many who seek justice or retribution through the courts have sinned and been forgiven by God through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)**

Please consider another thought on freedom of speech. Perhaps because we have that freedom, we think that it is our right to tell crude jokes, use crass or vulgar language, or belittle or slander others (especially through social media). I have known nonbelieving friends and coworkers who are far more appropriate and considerate in their speech than many fellow believers. Brethren, is that how we should represent Christ as His ambassadors?

**Let no unwholesome [corrupt] word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:29-32)

**But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints [believers]; and there must be no filthiness and silly [foolish] talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.** (Ephesians 5:3-4)

### ***Right to Bear Arms***

It seems that many Americans, including many believers, consider gun ownership the most important constitutional right (2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment)—perhaps even the most important God-given right. It is as though they would rather die than to give up their guns, so they actively fight any legislation that would enact or potentially infer any restrictions on gun ownership (none of which pertain to using a gun for hunting). Is this position supported by Scripture?

When Jesus told His disciples to obtain swords prior to His betrayal (Luke 22:35-38), I believe that He was testing them. Furthermore, I believe that they failed the test by obtaining two swords. If Jesus had meant for the disciples to have swords, then all of them should have obtained swords (Luke 22:36). However, after the disciples acquired two swords, Jesus said (*perhaps* sarcastically) that two were enough because, I believe, He was trying to teach them a lesson of faith. The people who came to arrest Jesus had swords and clubs, and yet He did not want or expect His disciples to defend Him against His captors (Luke 22:52-53).

**Jesus answered [Pontius Pilate], “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants [disciples] would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”** (John 18:36)

When Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest to protect Jesus, Jesus miraculously restored the person’s ear (Luke 22:47-51; John 18:10-11). At the same time, Jesus said that those who live by the sword will die by the sword (Matthew 26:51-54). Instead of obtaining the two swords, I believe the disciples should have recalled all of the miracles performed by Jesus and acknowledged their trust in Him that everything would work out in accordance with God’s plans. Through veiled and plain language Jesus had said He would be killed and would be raised from the dead (John 2:18-22; Matthew 16:21-22; 17:22-23; 26:31-32), and yet the disciples tried to stop that from happening.

Although we can discern and learn from the disciples’ actions, we are in no position to condemn them for their actions because their eyes had not yet been opened to many of the truths taught to them by Jesus (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). We, on the other hand, have the completed word of God and the Holy

Spirit to help us understand it; still, all understanding is by the grace of God and not by our own intelligence or wisdom (Ephesians 1:15-21; I Corinthians 2:6-13).

I want to follow up on the statement by Jesus that those who live by the sword will die by the sword from two perspectives. First, unlike during the Old Testament when God usually used the armies of Israel to conquer the land and defend the nation,<sup>15</sup> God will no longer use the men of Israel to fight His battles (Matthew 26:53; Revelation 13:10; 14:14-20; 19:11-21; 20:7-10). During the time of the great tribulation, when Satan's representative (referred to as *the beast*) rules the world and is worshiped by the world, the believing remnant of Israel will suffer persecution as never before seen. However, the believers will not fight back or defend themselves; instead, they will live by faith (Revelation 13:1-10). Brethren, similar to Israel's future, believers in this dispensation are not instructed to prepare for or fight God's battles.

And second, we are not instructed in Scripture to arm ourselves for protection. When the disciples were sent out to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus did not tell them to carry weapons—he would provide for them (Matthew 10:5-10). There is nothing in Scripture that says or implies that Paul carried a weapon or instructed his coworkers to do so, even though unbelieving Jews actively tried to kill Paul (Acts 9:23-25; 14:2-7, 19). Paul and other apostles and their coworkers died at the hands of God's enemies (II Timothy 4:6-7; II Peter 1:12-15; Acts 7:54-60). Many believers who stood for Christ were persecuted, including being put to death, by their own countrymen (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11; I Thessalonians 2:14-16). Would it have turned out differently if they had armed and defended themselves? No. Would they have been relying on the strength and will of God if they had done so? No.

Many people, including believers, arm themselves (often excessively) to protect themselves and their families against *the government* (i.e., government oppression, whether real or perceived). They forget that the government consists of our police forces and all the military services that are composed of fellow Americans who are well-armed and highly trained to kill. If our governing authority turns against its citizens, a few guns are not going to protect us if we try to fight back. Furthermore, we need to remember that we, as believers, are not to rebel against our government.

Men are responsible for taking care of their families (I Timothy 5:8), and we are to love one another and live quiet lives (I Thessalonians 4:9-12). Does that mean or imply armed protection? No. We have far too many examples of guns in households that end up being used, accidentally or intentionally, in the injury or death of family members. Also, using a gun for protection will usually end badly (Matthew 26:52).

Some people live in areas of excessive crime out of no choice of their own. A man should carefully examine himself whether he should expose his wife and children to a life of likely violence. If he has no choice but to live in such a place, he should do so by faith and not according to his own strength. I believe that the same principle applies to women who live alone. I have been told (judgmentally and abusively) by fellow brethren that this position is unrealistic, irresponsible, and ignorant; however, my desire is to live in accordance with the word and will of God.

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<sup>15</sup> Sometimes God did such things miraculously as He did when destroying the wall of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-21) and defending Jerusalem against the King of Assyria (II Kings 19:32-35).

Instead of arming ourselves for our protection, we should leave guns in the hands of law enforcement and the military. Furthermore, we should put on the armor of God and rely on His strength.

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength [power] of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist [withstand] in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)**

Furthermore, instead of arming ourselves for protection, we should believe what God has revealed to us through His word:

- All things work out for good for those who belong to God (Romans 8:28-30). This is God's long-term plan and promise for us, and we are likely to experience difficult times and situations along the way.
- God began a good work in us and will complete it (Philippians 1:6).
- God is accomplishing His will through us (Philippians 2:12-13).
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).
- We will be persecuted if we live for Christ (II Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29-30).
- We are to live by faith (Galatians 2:20; Romans 1:16-17; I Corinthians 2:3-5).

## Summary

Hopefully this study has demonstrated, through Scriptural support, that all those in governing authority are in their positions by the will of God. Furthermore, we are expected by God to obey the laws of our government, except in cases where specific laws are contrary to the will of God and force us to sin. American believers, as with all American citizens, have constitutional rights; however, there are some rights that we should not exercise because to do so would be sinning against God.

Brethren, we have no Christian rights regardless of how we interpret the Constitution. Instead of claiming persecution and demanding justice if we feel we are wronged for living or standing truthfully for our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ, we should expect to suffer persecution and count it as a blessing. We are not to fight back through lawsuits or armed resistance. Instead, God wants us to bless those who persecute us and show kindness to our enemies. How is this possible?

God demonstrated this principle of blessing those who persecute us by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins even though we were His enemies. In response to God's forgiveness and gift of salvation, He wants us to realize what He has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ and live our lives accordingly. God wants us to walk in such a manner that is worthy of, or befitting, our salvation.

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:8-10)**

**Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)**

**Therefore be imitators [followers] of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)**

**Therefore I [*Paul*], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [*salvation*] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)**

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