

REBELLION IS A NO-NO!

We live in a country founded on rebellion. The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), coming on the heels of decades of strife between the American colonies and Great Britain, involved citizens rising up against their rulers. All the so-called “founding fathers” were traitors. Benjamin Franklin likely reflected what was on the mind of the signers of the Declaration of Independence when he reportedly said “[w]e must all hang together, or most assuredly, we will hang separately.”

In the big scheme of things, barely had that war ended (many think the War of 1812 was really the end of our strife with Great Britain), when another so-called War of Rebellion arrived, also known as the Civil War. The official records of the union and confederate armies are maintained by our government and exist to this day as the result of an Act of Congress enacted in May, 1864. That piece of legislation was officially titled “The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.” Rebellion is in the DNA of this nation.

Today, faced with this long-lived pandemic, there is much hooting and hollering amongst the citizenry, objecting to various and sundry governmental edicts about coping with and managing the plague. How dare the government interfere with our “freedom” by telling us to wear masks, socially distance, limit commerce, and so on.

This is a taste of the milieu we live in, and it dates back to the crib days of this nation.

True Christians, being the subjects of a kingdom that is not of this world, might be led to believe they are released from the ties of obedience to human authorities, especially when those authorities are not Christians. The elect of God living in this country additionally swim in this sea of open rebellion.

In the thirteenth chapter of Romans, Paul makes short shrift of any notion that the Lord’s sheep are free to evade, ignore or resist human

government. He commands every soul – both Jew and Gentile – to be subject to the existing powers. He makes no exception¹ as to the nature or constitution of that government. He makes no mention of monarchies, republics, democracies or mixed constitutions. Instead, he applies all his precepts to every form that government may assume.

Given the political climate of this nation at this time, we would be well-advised to give careful heed to the directives laid down in scripture, including Romans 13, lest we be swept away by the opinions of this world and of those who **despise government** (2 Peter 2:10). We are, after all, surrounded by those who **despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities** (Jude 8), that is to say, those who despise the authority of their governors. We must be quite cautious in this environment. We must **[h]onor the king.** (1 Peter 2:17).

When we look at Romans 13, while we know that particular epistle was written to a specific church in a precise location and time, the admonitions contained therein apply to all times and circumstances. They are intended for the instruction and guidance of the Lord's people in every country and every age. They apply to us.

Moreover, this chapter of scripture gives us a rule concerning our duty to civil government which is clear and concise. For sure, this is a practical subject that is given full and explicit consideration in the word of God, both in Romans 13 and elsewhere. Here are some samples:

¹ There is one exception to this rule of obedience. **Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.** (Acts 5:29). Gill concisely states the meaning: *[M]en, civil magistrates, and ecclesiastical rulers, are to be obeyed in things which are not repugnant to the will of God; but in things that are, God is to be obeyed, and not men.*

But this is an exception to the general rule, and as such, is to be narrowly applied, with the burden resting on he who raises it. There is a maxim in law that says as much.

Accordingly, when any child of God considers disregarding the rules of human government as being inconsistent with God's law, that course of action should be taken cautiously, with great thought and counsel.

¹³ Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

¹⁴ Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

¹⁵ For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

¹⁶ As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. (1 Peter 2:13-16).

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

² To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (Titus 3:1-2).

In the most solemn manner, subjection to the existing powers is enjoined. This, of course, is contrary to the wisdom of the world, as we see all around us every day, and contrary to the proud heart of man. How natural the opposite doctrine is to the carnal heart can be seen by human history, which is made up of continual rebellion to human government.

That said, let us now look at Romans Chapter 13:

¹³ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

⁸ Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

⁹ For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

¹⁰ Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

¹³ Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

¹⁴ But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

So we see, the admonition applies to **every soul** (Romans 13:1), in every time, every country, every circumstance, all varieties of situations and all occasions.

We are to be subject to **higher powers** (Romans 13:1) which phrase means all persons who possess authority and are rulers. For our purposes in this day and age, we are talking about human government. This passage

expressly enjoins obedience to all governments equally. This injunction applies to existing powers, irrespective of how they acquired that status.

Why? Answer: Because God has ordained those powers to exist. No tyrant ever gained power till God gave it to him. Wicked rulers are necessary in God's plans to punish wicked nations. It is not merely the form of civil government that is from God, but the governors themselves. Simply stated, the powers that be – that exist in any country – are appointed by God. The type of government is irrelevant.

This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. (Daniel 4:17).

I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. (Jeremiah 27:5-6).

Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. (Daniel 2:37-38).

For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. (Psalm 75:6-8).

That last verse, Psalm 75:8, is a doozy (something outstanding or unique of its kind). Here is the best explanation of what the Psalmist is saying, courtesy of Benson:

In the hand of the Lord there is a cup — God is here compared to the master of a feast, who, in those days, used to distribute portions of

meats or drinks to the several guests, as he thought fit. A cup, in Scripture, is sometimes taken in a good sense for God's blessings, as [Psalm 16:5](#); [Psalm 23:5](#), and sometimes, and more frequently, in a bad sense, for his vengeance and judgments, [Psalm 11:6](#); [Isaiah 51:22](#); [Jeremiah 49:12](#); [Matthew 20:23](#); and so it is here understood, as the following words show. And the wine is red —

*Such as the best wine in Judea was, ([Deuteronomy 32:14](#); [Proverbs 23:31](#).) and therefore strong and intoxicating. Or, is troubled, as **רַמְחָה**, chamar, more properly signifies, and is rendered by divers learned men. Thus he expresses the power and fierceness of God's wrath and judgments. It is full of mixture — The wine is mingled, not with water, but with strengthening and intoxicating ingredients. "Calamity and sorrow, fear and trembling, infatuation and despair, the evils of the present life, and of that which is to come, are the bitter ingredients of this cup of mixture." And he poureth out of the same — As it is entirely in the hand and disposal of God, so, through every age, he has been pouring out, and administering of its contents, more or less, in proportion to the sins of men; but the dregs thereof — The worst and most dreadful part of those tribulations; all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out — Shall be compelled to squeeze out every drop of wrath and misery which they contain; and drink them — For the curse shall enter into their bowels like water, and like oil into their bones. They shall be compelled to endure the utmost effects of the divine vengeance upon their sins, partly in this life, but more fully in the life to come, when the cup of the Lord's indignation will be to them in an especial manner a cup of trembling, of everlasting trembling; when burning coals, fire and brimstone, and a horrible eternal tempest shall be the portion of their cup, [Psalm 11:6](#). And they shall be thus tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, and shall have no rest day nor night, and the smoke of their torment shall ascend up for ever and ever, [Revelation 14:10-11](#).*

If you set yourself against human power, you are literally opposing the ordinance of God (Romans 13:2). Resistance to human government then is resistance to God, a place you really don't want to be.

If you do so, you shall receive . . . damnation. (Romans 13:2). There's no sugar-coating that. It's the same thought set forth in 1 Corinthians 11:29: **For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.** The thought includes not only condemnation and punishment from the civil powers, but from the supreme sovereign. This is not to be understood as final damnation in hell fire, but punishment, such as we find in Galatians 5:10: **I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.**

We are told that **rulers are not a terror to good works** (Romans 13:3). The "good works" there referenced refer to works generally accounted good in society. This is a general declaration with respect to all governments; the very worst of them is a blessing.

Indeed, in verse 4 of Romans Chapter 13, civil rulers are twice denominated **the minister of God**, the first time as being good for the Lord's people and the second time as being for the punishment of evil-doers.

Haldane writes: *But none are so much indebted to it as Christians, to each of whom it may indeed be emphatically said, it is the minister to thee for good. Were the restraints of government removed, Christians would be attacked, persecuted, or destroyed in any country. Even the persecution of the worst government would not be so bad as the persecution of the world, if freed from the restraint of law.* (Emphasis in original).

These ministers of God are appointed by God, to execute his will, for our benefit. They **bear not the sword in vain** so that those which do evil should **be afraid** (Romans 13:4). The meaning is that civil government wears a badge of authority to execute laws and people are influenced by fear to keep that law, even if they have no better motive. And beyond that, civil government has real power to inflict punishment and Christians are here told to stay away from conspiracies or any other efforts to rise up against the civil authorities as they will surely be punished, most likely beyond what punishment will befall a typical citizen.

In truth, civil government is a mercy. Without the powerful obstacle presented by human government to the selfish, violent and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live in the wilderness with the wild

beasts. As soon as its restraints are removed, man shows himself in his real character. This we have seen time and again, both on a first hand basis, and on the daily news.

When there was no king in Israel [and] every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25), we see in the last three chapters of the Book of Judges the dreadful consequences. We in this church have often examined that portion of scripture. If your memory has faded, I encourage you to take a fresh read; the details are horrific almost beyond belief.

Even an oppressive government inures to the benefit of God's chosen seed. When the Jews were carried captive to Babylon, God by his prophet commanded them to seek and to pray for the peace of the city. **And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.** (Jeremiah 29:7). Ultimately, God made the tyrannical rulers of Babylon his ministers for the good of his people.

Romans 13:5 tells us we should obey human government, not only because to do otherwise will result in punishment, but because it's the right thing to do – **for conscience sake.**

Mankind generally would run rough shod over civil laws if there were no threat of sentence. But that should not be true for the Lord's people. Christians should obey from a conscientious regard to the authority of God thus interposed. God's in charge! **The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.** (Proverbs 21:1). His people have peace no matter what party gets into power because they know that in everything God fulfills his purposes by those magistrates.

And because civil government exists by appointment of God, taxes are to be paid willingly by Christ's chosen folk: **for this cause pay ye tribute.** (Romans 13:6). Civil servants, doing the will of God (they are **God's ministers,** Romans 13:6), devote their time and energies to that end, and are entitled to remuneration. The Lord's people should gladly do their financial duty to that end.

Romans 13:7 informs us that taxes are dues, that is to say, debts. We are explicitly taught that taxes stand in the eyes of God on the same footing

as private debts, which every man is under an obligation to discharge. And Jesus answering said unto them, **Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.** (Mark 12:17). This verse in Romans 13 also instructs us that we are to fear (respect) and honor civil authorities.

It is in this overall connection that Paul writes that we are to **[o]we no man anything.** (Romans 13:8). In other words, we are supposed to pay our debts. Haldane says: *Christians ought to attend most scrupulously to this injunction. It is a great injury to men, and a reproach to Christianity, when the servants of God neglect this duty. It is a virtual breach of the eighth commandment.]*

The Bible is rich with passages encouraging a sober and industrious lifestyle which removes affections from the splendor, gaiety and extravagances which in turn lead to the incurring of debts. Here is a sample: **I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.** (Proverbs 24:30-34).

And Matthew Henry speaks to this passage: *Christians must avoid useless expense, and be careful not to contract any debts they have not the power to discharge. They are also to stand aloof from all venturesome speculations and rash engagements, and whatever may expose them to the danger of not rendering to all their due. Do not keep in any one's debt. Give every one his own. Do not spend that on yourselves, which you owe to others.*

The closing verses of Romans 13 revolve around verse 11: **And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.**

The meaning is and especially now is it time we got our act together, this late in the ballgame. Many years have gone by since our confession of faith. These rules of lifestyle covered in this chapter apply now more than ever. We are on the cusp of leaving this earth for heaven. **The night is far**

spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. (Romans 13:12-13)

We should conduct ourselves in a modest, decent and becoming manner. Poole: *Let us behave ourselves decently, and with a holy shamefacedness, as becomes those to whom the grace of God, and the glorious light of the gospel, hath appeared.*

To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.
(Romans 16:27).