

Week Three “The Religion of the Revolution”

Topics:
The Romans 13 “Problem”
The Declaration of Independence

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT

Jesus said:

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” (Matt. 22:21)

Question:

- Was Jesus giving practical guidance?
- *Compare* Luke 12:14; John 18:37

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT

Romans 13:1, 4

1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. * * * *

4 For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT

Key points:

- We are to obey those in authority. (Rom. 13:1)
- A key purpose of government is to keep order. (Rom. 13:4)

Question:

Is there ever a time when it is right to reject the government’s commands because they conflict with God’s?

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT

Answer-

When following the law would make you disobey God’s commands:

- **OT:** Refusing to obey in Daniel 3
- **OT:** Defiance of edict in Daniel 6
- **NT:** Disobeying the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:19-20
- **NT:** Further disobedience in Acts 5:29

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT

- Modernly, Bonhoeffer’s opposition to the German government

The Revolutionary War



REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Pre-revolutionary conditions:

- Taxation and stamps
- Quartering and immunity of troops
- Messengers, general warrants
- Investigating/punishing critics of the king
- Religious grounds?

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Question:

Given Romans 13, how do you justify rebelling against the king?

THE ENLIGHTENMENT / RATIONALISM

Influence of rationalism:

- Reason trumps or moderates scripture as a source of knowledge about God
- A belief that if you can't recognize it as true using reason, then it probably isn't
- Includes beliefs in rational morality, benevolence, scientific progress, and tolerance for other religions

REVOLUTIONARY ERA SERMONS



Jonathan Mayhew

- 1720 - 1766 (Boston)
- Harvard College
- Ordained Unitarian pastor
- Sermons printed and distributed
- Reason was the "final court of appeal" for all matters of faith

REVOLUTIONARY ERA SERMONS

Mayhew: *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Nonresistance to the Higher Powers*

- Took on Romans 13
- Widely influential - gave other preachers a religious and "biblical" basis for promoting the revolution
- Resulting motto: "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."

REVOLUTIONARY ERA SERMONS

Mayhew's argument (condensed):

- Lays out Romans 13 and then dismembers it
- Legit government pursues good for society
- Only rulers who pursue good are ordained by God
- Disobeying good rulers is a sin — but not bad rulers
- Mayhew's footnote: Maybe Paul wasn't talking about Nero*

THE CASE FOR WAR

John Adams called Mayhew the "morning gun" of the American Revolution.

Question:

If Mayhew was scripturally wrong, what does it mean for us today?

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE



Influences going into 1776:

- Oppression of British rule
- Locke's ideas about social contract, government
- Using "reason" to measure God
- Mayhew's and others' sermons

Then, the Declaration of Independence

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

IS IT A CHRISTIAN DOCUMENT?

"God words" in the Declaration:

- **Para. 1:** "nature's God"
- **Para. 2:** "their Creator"
- **Last Para.:** "Supreme Judge of the world"
- **Last Para.:** "protection of Divine Providence"

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE



Declaration of Independence:

All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights... **life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**

Challenge question:

Where in the Bible does God grant us those rights?

TAKE-AWAYS

- Spiritual boasting should only be about Christ, not national history or identity. Gal. 6:15-16.

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

- Let the gospel "out of the cage," don't try to defend it with American myths.