

**Flight, Fight, or Faith:
Responding to A Hostile Government
Romans 13:1-7**

The history of our great nation has been one of conflict from the beginning. Wars have been a constant companion. What with the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Indian Wars, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, WWI, WWII, Korean, Vietnamese, Gulf Wars and Afghanistan – it seems that barely a decade can go by without Americans going to war. Wars may be necessary when people become addicted to the blessedness of freedom. Any threat by others to take away what the founding fathers conceived and brought forth should be met with war, if necessary. This I believe is the moral right of a nation.

But what is to be done when the threat to individual liberty stems from the government itself? I am talking particularly about the conduct of believers. As freeborn citizens of these United States, what should committed followers of Jesus Christ do if a government run by officials elected by a majority of Americans limit or take away significant and long-held liberties? Are we to take up arms and fight to win back our liberties? Should we simply flee to another country where perhaps the liberties we cherish are practiced? Should we seek to influence a majority of our fellow-citizens to vote at the next election in order to win back what government has taken away? Or should we wait, pray, and trust God to accomplish His divine will in the earth?

Our nation is 14 trillion dollars in debt, and we have more than 100 trillion dollars in unfunded mandates over the next 30-50 years. Is anybody surprised that Social Security cannot pay its bills? The program was designed to pay out less benefits than the revenues it takes in. But if the approximately 100 million people who were supposed to be paying into the system cannot do so because they were not allowed to be born, then the system will eventually collapse. There will be awesome consequences. Once the government has most of the people enrolled in Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare and Medicaid, Section 8 Housing and Food Stamps – and dependent on it for food, shelter, and medical care – bankruptcy is not an option. When the government is no longer able to feed, shelter, and medically care for these people, there will be chaos. Lawlessness will rule in the street. What will committed followers of Jesus Christ do then?

The apostle Paul wrote the following words to believers in Rome 2000 years ago:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God. So the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will incur judgment (for rulers cause no fear for good conduct but for bad). Do you desire not to fear authority? Do good and you will receive its

commendation, for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be in fear, for it does not bear the sword in vain. It is God's servant to administer retribution on the wrongdoer. *Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection*, not only because of the wrath of the authorities but also because of your conscience. For this reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants devoted to governing. *Pay everyone what is owed*: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due (NET, italics added).

Perhaps no passage in the Bible deals more cogently with the relationship between believers and the state than Romans 13:1-7. Paul specifically defines how believers are to respond to the authority God has invested in the state. Lest the reader forget, Paul is a citizen of the Roman Empire. Many of the freedoms we enjoy as Americans have their basis in the Greco-Roman culture of the ancient past. The apostle Paul was a citizen of that world and a committed follower of Jesus Christ. The Roman government was hostile to the recently emerging faith that would come to be known as Christianity. Tens of thousands would die in the process. Yet the apostle Paul commands (with God's approval) two things:

- (1) Believers are to be subject to the ruling authorities (13:1 and 5).
- (2) Believers are to pay their taxes (13:7).

Paul argues in verse 1 that the command to submit to the ruling authorities (government) is founded on the fact that God has ordained and appointed all governing authority. He states, "there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God". It therefore stands to reason that anyone resisting governmental authority is resisting the will of God, because "the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will incur judgment", verse 2. So Paul declares here that believers should submit to their respective governments because they have God's authority to punish those who do evil (Romans 13:3-4). He further explains that it is right for believers to submit to the state because it not only will punish lawbreakers, but also because it is right and good to submit to the authority that God has ordained. Paul concludes with a final exhortation that believers should pay their taxes (Romans 13:6-7).

The meaning of what Paul wrote is clear. However, we must still decide how to apply what Paul wrote in our modern context. The government (regardless of its form, i.e., dictator, republic, communist, or something else) has authority over its citizens and can put to death those who resist its will. Those who find rules and regulations of their government to be inconsistent with their own personal values have several choices. First, there is the option of non-violent civil disobedience. Those who would utilize this option must be fully prepared to suffer the consequences of their actions. The state may or may not exercise mercy. Death may be the

ultimate price for such actions. If believers chose this option, they should be fully prepared to die and should do so without complaining or resisting.

A second option for responding to a government that violates the conscience of its citizenry is the right of those individuals to flee to some other place to live. Do not forget that we are talking about believers here. Objectionable practice by the governing authorities may require men and women of good faith to move along to find a place to live out the commands of their God and Savior.

The third option that committed followers of Jesus Christ have is to work within the political system to bring change. If the government allows its citizens to control what it does or does not do, then the majority of those citizens has the right to vote for the outcome it desires. As Americans, because of the form and history of our government, it is the duty of those who truly follow the teachings of Jesus Christ to seek to influence our government for good by electing men and women who will advocate for their constituency.

It is our conviction that true believers to be faithful to the Scriptures and the constitution must first seek to change the governmental system to insure that God's values are maintained – please vote. If the vote fails, then we must sometimes resort to civil disobedience and be willing to accept the consequences. Our last option is to leave. This nation began as a last resort for those who could no longer live under their government. There is no biblical basis for taking up arms against the government for those who believe Romans 13:1-7 is God's word. Not only does the state have the right to put to death those who seek to overthrow it by force, but God also will not look with favor on those who commit such acts.

Ultimately, if one's faith is in God he will provide for his people. We forget that on one occasion during the earthly ministry of our Lord, he needed to pay his taxes. The Lord instructed Peter to "go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself." The Lord miraculously provided the resources to pay what was owed. Some who claim to trust in the Lord have little to show for it. God will provide! Trust him.

As believers, we must remember that regardless of how favorable a government may be towards those who faithfully follow Jesus Christ, the day is coming when all governments on the face of the earth will be hostile to the followers of Jesus Christ. I am personally convinced that those days have come. We will continue to face opposition. We will continue to be called names and treated as being out-of-step with the majority. Our circles will grow smaller. Do you have what it takes to remain faithful under these circumstances? Now is the time to prepare!!!!