

Word Foundations

INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Biblical Case for Opposing Tyranny

Parts 1 and 2

Only a small portion of the links (citations) originally appearing in these articles appear in this edition. Please go to <https://bit.ly/33pNIM0> for part 1 and to <https://bit.ly/3ruGfmU> for part 2. These online editions contain hyperlinks as well as audio and video items.

Part 1

It is in the interest of tyrants to reduce the people to ignorance and vice. For they cannot live in any country where virtue and knowledge prevail.

—Samuel Adams—

If Truth is taken away from us, then Right and Wrong are taken from us as well. If we don't know Right and Wrong, then we can't, we won't control ourselves, but will look to someone else to bring order through brute force and raw power. We will be controlled by a tyrant, and we will no longer be free.

—Frank Peretti—

Key point: To effectively resist illegitimate government mandates, we must first become familiar with God's design for governments and His design for the exercise of governmental authority in its various spheres. We can more effectively resist abuse when we are able to readily recognize it.

On Sunday, September 26, 2021, Sam Jones, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Hudson, Iowa, preached a message titled “The Biblical Case for Religious Exemptions.” In this post and the next, I’d like to recap some of the insights Pastor Sam offered regarding God-ordained governments, abuse of divinely delegated authority, decisions of conscience, and religious exemptions.

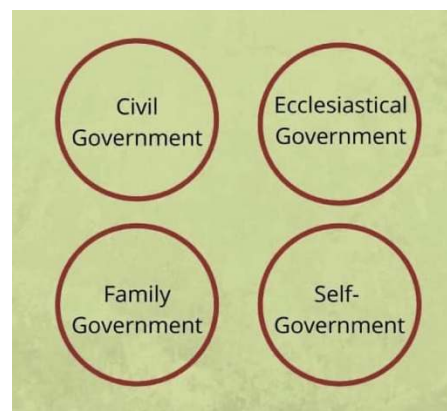
Part 1 primarily will focus on the various types of authority God has delegated, and how knowing God’s design for government in its various forms gives us understanding about how to navigate some of the choices that confront us today, in our tyranny-prone world. Sam’s sermon is available on video and in written form at the end of this article. While I have relied on it heavily as I have written this article, I do more here than merely report what Sam said. I share several additional insights that flow from and relate to the points the Iowa preacher made. One might say I build on Sam’s initial, excellent work. While I certainly want people to read what I have written here and what I’ll share in part 2, there’s no substitute for listening to Sam’s sermon directly. I can’t recommend it highly enough.

Four Types of Government

We tend to think of government only in terms of its manifestation in civil society. We call this civil government. But civil government isn’t the only type of government God authorized. God did not ordain just one sphere of government or authority, but four. In Scripture we see

- civil government
- ecclesiastical or church government,
- family government, and
- self-government.

Let’s look at each of these. We’ll have more to say at this point about civil government than the other three forms, but keep in mind the larger picture. This post is not primarily about civil government, but about the different forms or spheres of government God has established and recognizes, and about the specific responsibilities of each. It’s also about how each of the spheres relates to the other three spheres God has ordained.



Civil Government

The Bible's initial statement regarding the purpose for civil government can be found in Genesis 9:6, with verses 1-17 as its broader context.

Note that in these verses God established a covenant with Noah. God emphasized to Noah and his wife, and to their sons and their wives,

- that He was broadening their food supply to include meat from animals,
- that human life is sacred,
- that they should “be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it,” and
- that He was placing His bow in the clouds to remind humanity of His covenant, a covenant that includes a promise not to destroy the earth again with a flood.
- Although it wasn't stated explicitly, the rainbow also would be a reminder of God's supreme authority over humanity.

Authority Is Given to Civil Government to Protect Human Life by Punishing Murderers

So, Genesis 9:6 represents the establishment of civil government. The building of the Tower of Babel reflects the new reality of civil government and the kind of community it validates. People came together and, through a camaraderie that didn't exist before, worked together to build the tower. Yet they acted contrary to God's intention from the start, because they replaced God with government (see Gen. 11:1-9). When the people refused to recognize and honor God, and when they usurped His authority with their own (and used the tower to do it), God intervened and broke up those who had united to defy Him. The people

³said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

⁶And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.

While civil government acts *for* God with the authority God gave it, it must never act *as* God.

Therefore, even within a very short time after civil government was established, it was abused — and God stepped in and overruled the implementation of the plans that were underway. The authority of civil government, you see, is *delegated* — not absolute.

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While civil government acts *for* God with the authority God gave it, it must never act *as* God. In fact, no government ever has the right to act *as* God. When *any* governmental entity (whether civil, family, ecclesiastical, or individual) acts as God, it oversteps its delegated authority. God *will* hold it accountable.

Capital Punishment for Murderers as Prescribed in Genesis 9:6 Is the Foundation of Civil Government

Genesis 9:6, to which we referred earlier, declares,

Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.

Here we see the foundation of civil government. The principle is this: At its most foundational level, the purpose of government is to punish the wicked and protect the innocent — and in doing so to preserve the image of God in human beings.

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Centuries later, the apostles Paul and Peter would write explicitly and more specifically about this. Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 reveal God's design for government in the civic arena. Also, in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul would highlight a result of government's properly fulfilling its delegated responsibilities — societal order.

Let's summarize: What is government's job? Civil government's job is to commend or reward those who do right and to punish those who do wrong. When government acts in this way, it maintains societal order. Without order, no society can function.

Of course, other legitimate tasks exist for government, such as maintaining a military force to defend the country and maintaining monetary and economic systems. These are implicitly affirmed in the Bible, as they are assumed to be legitimate governmental tasks. What Scripture does *not* authorize government to do is provide for the nation's people. God gives that job to the people themselves (see <https://bit.ly/3rq9rM2>).

What is the task God assigned to civil government? Government's job is to commend or reward those who do right and to punish those who do wrong. When government acts in this way, it maintains societal order.

People Who Police Themselves Need Fewer Police in the Community

In a few moments, we will briefly discuss self-government and the biblical basis for recognizing it. Self-government is needed in every society to maintain order and freedom. If and when people voluntarily obey God's laws, they can exercise a great measure of freedom, including freedom to create, produce, interact with others, buy, sell, trade, prosper, worship as they choose, pursue happiness, and enjoy life. Note that

- freedom or personal liberty

goes hand-in-hand with

- fulfilling one's duty and responsibilities to God and
- respecting the rights of others as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

Please pay close attention to this section. It is vitally important that Christians, and all freedom-loving people, understand what we're saying here. It is this kind of freedom (freedom regulated by widespread respect for God's laws) that makes it possible for a society to affirm personal liberty while, at the same time, maintaining order. As Founding Father John Adams observed, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The *more* people respect and align their behavior with God's expressed will, the *less* the civil government needs to act. Further, the *less* respect society has for divine laws, the *more* government must work to maintain justice and promote order. It easily can snowball from there. The more government must act, the less freedom the people have, and the more opportunity tyrants have to rule with an iron fist.

Civil Authority, Like the Authority in Each of the Four Spheres of Government, Is Delegated

No government, and no form of government, has unlimited authority. All governmental authority (including civil, ecclesiastical, family, and self) is divinely delegated.

Paul's and Peter's statements about civil government in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 should be viewed as prescriptive, not descriptive. When Paul wrote his letter to the Roman Christians, Nero was emperor; and Nero certainly wasn't acting to fulfill God's design for government. He was abusing his God-given authority. As Del Tackett indicates in *The Truth Project*, these passages reveal God's design for government; they are filled with "design language." Therefore, Scripture does not command submission to government in absolutely everything it — government — might direct. Let's make it personal. When government tells you you must not do something God commands, or when it requires you to do something God forbids, it is acting illegitimately, and it is your duty to disobey the government and obey God.

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What Responsible Stewardship of Civil Authority Looks Like

The Founders of the United States of America got it right when, in the Declaration of Independence, they said,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

- Note that when government does what Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 say God has authorized it to do — commend those who do right and punish those who do wrong — people's unalienable, God-given rights are protected.
- Note also that it is not the purpose of government to *create* rights, but to *protect* natural rights, rights that already exist. Same-sex “marriage” is a great example of a “right” that never would exist without the government's creating it, because it does not exist naturally.
- Therefore, with the creation of this artificial right (same-sex “marriage”), the natural rights of others have been infringed upon. See Principle 8 in this article (<https://bit.ly/3Fwk58U>), and ask Barronelle Stutzman (<https://bit.ly/3roxhYl>) and Jack Phillips (<https://bit.ly/3GDLL1T>) if their rights haven't been affected.
- Note further: As we said earlier, it is not government's responsibility to meet the people's needs. That job belongs to the people themselves (see <https://bit.ly/3rq9rM2>).

Let's continue by looking briefly at Scriptural support for the three other forms of government Pastor Sam affirmed.

Ecclesiastical or Church Government

We read about ecclesiastical or church government in Hebrews 13:7,17 and 1 Peter 5:2-4. While these passages do not mention any exceptions to the command to obey pastors, it remains true that a pastors' and other spiritual leaders' authority is delegated and not absolute. No one ever is to submit to them if they advise doing anything contrary to God's revealed will. Further, we should recognize that ecclesiastical authority is distinct from the authority of the civil government. Neither entity is to try to exercise authority in the other's sphere. These are separate jurisdictions.

Family Government

Family government is yet another sphere of authority that is separate and distinct. We read about family government in Scripture in Colossians 3:20, Ephesians 5:22-25, and Ephesians 6:1-4. This is not an exhaustive list of passages about family government, but it is representative. Note carefully that children are the responsibility of their parents, not the state. When the state acts as if children belong to it rather than parents, it is overstepping its authority and acting illegitimately.

Parents are responsible for raising, training, and educating their children. The state is not.

Self-Government

Self-government is highlighted in Scripture in numerous places, but Proverbs 25:28 and Titus 2:6 (context vv. 6-8) are two key passages emphasizing it. Also, Scripture commends discipline and hard work, as well (see <https://bit.ly/3ruqY5A>). In his sermon, Pastor Sam declared,

The fourth sphere of government is self-government. There are certain things that God has delegated to you, that you are to govern of yourself. In Proverbs 25:28, it says, "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls." And in Titus 2:6 it says this: "Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded" or that idea of self-control.

Principles to Remember

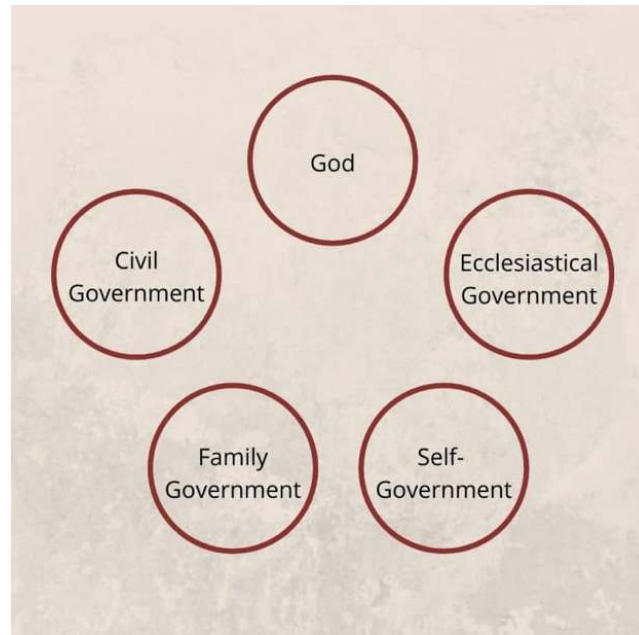
One: The relationships between these four types of governments are not best represented by a chain, but by different lanes of traffic.

In other words, each sphere of authority has its own job and its own set of responsibilities, and the individual or individuals charged with fulfilling those specific responsibilities are not to wield their authority in the other spheres. When they do, their actions are illegitimate. Yes, at times there will be overlap between spheres, or tasks that are similar. Nevertheless, each person or persons with authority must act in the sphere in which he/she/they are given authority, and not in another or in others. Sam explained, “It isn’t a chain; rather it’s different lanes.” God, of course, has overarching authority. All other authorities are accountable to Him.

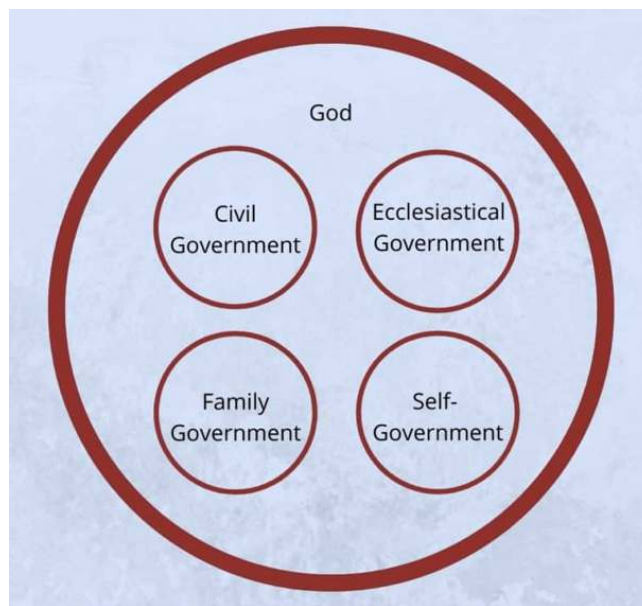
Two: Many who have read these passages of Scripture (see <https://bit.ly/33kxrIt>: civil government: Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2 • ecclesiastical or church government: Heb. 13:7,17; 1 Pet 5:2-4 • family government: Col. 3:20; Eph. 5:22-25; Eph. 6:1-4 • self-government: Prov. 25:28; Titus 2:6, 6-8) have noted that obedience to authorities is commanded without any exceptions being given. This does not mean we should obey in every possible scenario. We alluded to this earlier when we talked about ecclesiastical authority. When any authority orders actions prohibited by God or forbids actions commanded by God, people — and especially God’s people — have a responsibility “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Thus, while exceptions to obeying aren’t mentioned in these specific texts (<https://bit.ly/33kxrIt>), they are affirmed in other places in Scripture. Scripture’s assumption is that those in authority are acting responsibly.

When any authority orders actions prohibited by God or forbids actions commanded by God, people — and especially God’s people — have a responsibility “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Three: God’s having delegated His authority in each of these four spheres does not mean God is separate from each sphere, as pictured in Item 1, but that God is, and is to be, over *all* the spheres of government, as illustrated in Item 2. Item 2 not only indicates that God has delegated authority within each sphere, but also that He will hold those responsible in each sphere for how well he, she, or they stewarded the delegated responsibility.

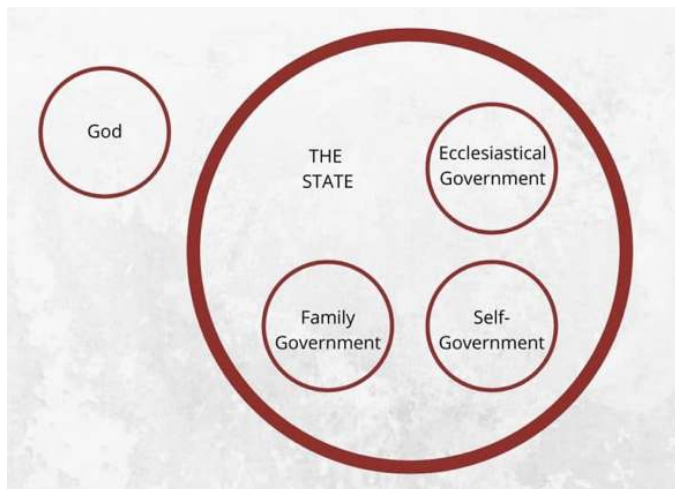


Item 1



Item 2

Four: Civil government, or the state, is very powerful, for God has been given it “the sword” (see Rom. 13:4,1-7) to punish evildoers. When those in authority in civil government begin to abuse their power and wield the sword to nefarious ends, tyranny results. The state effectively kicks God out and seeks to exercise authority in all the other spheres, even though God did not give the state (or civil government) jurisdiction in these areas (see Item 3).



Item 3

In lesson 9 of the biblical worldview video series titled *The Truth Project*, instructor Del Tackett describes the ugly nature of this scenario (see <https://bit.ly/3A9DHi7>). Dr. Tackett has named more spheres of authority than Pastor Sam has, but the principles, and the terrible scenario that unfolds, remain the same.

This is happening in America today. For example, despite the fact that God designed that parents would have primary responsibility for the upbringing and training of their children, the state is taking strong steps to act in the parental role.

On Tuesday evening, September 28, Virginians watched a debate between their two gubernatorial candidates — Democrat Terry McAuliffe and Republican Glenn Youngkin. Writing for the Home School Legal Defense Association Action, Joel Grewe reported,

As someone who has worked in the education arena of politics for thirteen years, I've never heard a clearer statement from a politician about what state-run education means.

Former governor and current gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe was asked why he vetoed a bill that would have given parents input into the resources available to their children in school libraries. This is how he responded:

"I'm not gonna let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decisions... I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach."

Watch and hear it here (see <https://bit.ly/34OOBy2>).

I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.

—Virginia gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe—

Could a clearer instance of abuse of divinely delegated authority be cited? Yet this isn't the only crystal clear example.

- An article in the online news service Citizen Free Press declares, “Protesting your school board is now Domestic Terrorism.”
- Not to be outdone, California Governor Gavin Newsom has issued vaccine mandates for all of California's school children, even those attending private schools.
- Dr. Anthony Fauci says he “would support” vaccine mandates for airline travel and schools. Despite indications that natural immunity provides greater protection from Covid than a vaccine alone, Dr. Fauci seems to have difficulty addressing this matter. As one article affirms, natural immunity “Is a Political Problem for the Regime.” Also, even though he admits children are extremely unlikely to die from Covid, Fauci still supports a vaccine mandate for children. Finally (even though what we're citing represents only “the tip of the iceberg” with regard to Fauci), *The Daily Wire* published an article titled “Fauci Slammed After Declaring It's ‘Just Too Soon To Tell’ If People Can Gather For Christmas.”

Make no mistake; all of this is tyranny. It is government acting as God. But wait! There's more!

Five: Your health is not the state's responsibility. It's *your* responsibility. Moreover, your health is outside of the state's jurisdiction. Sam declared, “God gave the civil government a sword; He didn't give them a syringe. Your individual health is not the responsibility of civil government. That's your responsibility. That's self-government.”

One mother in the Northwest lost her life as a result of being forced to take the Covid-19 vaccine against her will. Desperately wanting to participate in her daughters' school activities on site, she felt she was left with no other choice.

In New York, “Governor Kathy Hochul signed an executive order last night [on Sept. 28] declaring a statewide disaster emergency which allows unlicensed health care workers from other states

and countries ‘to practice in New York State without civil or criminal penalty related to lack of licensure.’” She’s trying to compensate for her state’s shortage of health care workers, a shortage caused when unvaccinated medical professionals were fired for refusing the shot.

Six: Your right to worship is not the state’s to revoke or manipulate. It is outside of the state’s jurisdiction, except for its responsibility to protect it. Nevertheless, a good many state authorities do not realize this or do not care. Authorities have had to be reined in on this issue (also go here); but they still need reminders, not just from lawyers and courts, but especially from pastors and parishioners who refuse to be told they cannot hold or attend public worship. Pastor Sam cites the biblical precedent for the principle that the state has no authority to regulate worship: The true story of Daniel in the lions’ den in Daniel 6.

In the end, Daniel was vindicated. He survived a full night in the lion’s den. As Daniel declared to the king, “God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you” (Dan. 6:22).

The Bottom Line

As you can see, Pastor Sam presents some very strong points as he builds the biblical case for religious exemptions. Next time we will consider more of them, but for now, please note that all the items we have discussed thus far already constitute strong case for resisting illegitimate mandates — directives issued beyond God-given authority and outside the appropriate sphere or jurisdiction.

While we Christians must respect and obey all lawful and legitimate authority, we also must push back against illegitimate authority. We must insist that leaders lead within the spheres designated or assigned to them.

The Biblical Case for Opposing Tyranny, Part 2 Fireproof!

The enemy was hurled back by the retreating British and French troops.

—Winston Churchill—

Every collectivist revolution rides in on a Trojan horse of “emergency”. It was the tactic of Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini. In the collectivist sweep over a dozen minor countries of Europe, it was the cry of men striving to get on horseback. And “emergency” became the justification of the subsequent steps. This technique of creating emergency is the greatest achievement that demagoguery attains.

—Herbert Hoover—

We [Christians] Will Not Be Silenced

—Erwin W. Lutzer—

Key points: In the war to preserve religious liberty, Christians must understand and advocate unwaveringly for a biblical approach to government (a topic we explored in our last post). Along the way, religious exemptions for government mandates may be needed. A biblical precedent for such exemptions exists and illuminates the way for religious liberty advocates, even as they continue to fight for recognition of unalienable rights over the long haul.

From May 26 to June 4 of 1940, a miracle took place in northern France. In this photograph (<https://bit.ly/3fuzSut>), “Soldiers from the British Expeditionary Force fire at low flying German aircraft during the Dunkirk evacuation.” While the evacuation from Dunkirk was not technically a military victory, it prevented the Allies from experiencing what likely would have been total, and perhaps permanent, defeat. As the statement we have cited above from Prime Minister Winston Churchill affirms, even in retreat, the Allied forces kept the Germans from obliterating them. The Allied evacuation wasn’t cowardly, but strategic!

Hitler’s military forces had more than 350,000 Allied troops, most of whom were British, cornered at Dunkirk, a coastal town in northern France. The Nazis were about to annihilate them. Fully understanding just how dire the situation was, a naval officer from Great Britain had an opportunity

to send a message by cable to London. His message was brief — just three words — but rich with meaning: *But if not* were the three words the officer sent across the English Channel to his homeland.

The British people readily understood the message. In chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel in the Bible, three Hebrew men who had been brought into Babylonian captivity had been ordered, along with the rest of King Nebuchadnezzar's subjects, to bow down before a golden image the king had set up. When the music sounded, that was the signal: Bow down and worship the image or "be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:6).

The men's names in Hebrew were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but you probably know them by the names they were given after they arrived in Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, respectively (see Dan. 1:6-7). They already had earned Nebuchadnezzar's respect (see vv. 19-20), but now they were about to firmly, yet politely, disobey a royal command, even though disobedience would bring the death penalty down upon them.

Daniel 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If that is the case [if you must throw us in the furnace], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸**But if not**, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (3:16-18, emphasis added).

Robert B. Sloan, Bible scholar and president of Houston Baptist University, writes,

"But if not." These words were instantly recognizable to the people who were accustomed to hearing the scriptures read in church. They knew the story told in the book of Daniel. The message in those three little words was clear: The situation was desperate. The allied forces were trapped. It would take a miracle to save them, but they were determined not to give in. One simple three word phrase communicated all that.

Inexplicably, the German forces held back and failed to act decisively. Word of the trapped soldiers spread quickly throughout England, and the people came to the aid of their servicemen: "They answered" the three-word, coded message "with merchant marine boats, with pleasure

cruisers, and even with small fishing boats. By a miracle,” writes Dr. Sloan, “they evacuated more than 338,000 soldiers and took them to safety.”

The miracle, which was multi-faceted, included unusually calm weather. Normally the waters in the English Channel are choppy and hazardous, but remarkably, during those days in late May and early June, “the sea remained unusually calm with little more than a light breeze.” Also, the overcast sky between May 28 and 30 rendered Hitler’s forces unable to bomb the Allies and their countrymen as they performed rescue operations. Furthermore, gentle breezes pushed smoke over the beaches, creating a cover for the troops during the evacuation efforts.

While it’s true a great many wonderful things happened during the evacuation of Dunkirk because of the relentless efforts of a determined, embattled people; it’s also true that much occurred favoring them that they never could have arranged. *God* was smiling on the Allied forces, making it possible for them to return to face the Nazis and fight them in the future.

Trust God and Do the Right Thing

God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego from the furnace and taught King Nebuchadnezzar a profound lesson in the process. Also, He miraculously delivered Germany’s foes at a critical point early in the war. Delivered though they were, they had no guarantees. We need to understand something that was clear to the three Hebrew men as well as to the British officer who called the three-word message from Scripture to his countrymen: Even though God *can* deliver, He is not obligated to deliver.

The onus is on us. Will we resolve to do the right thing, even if it costs us dearly? With God’s help, we must do what we know to be right and trust God with the outcome. Relying on Him, we become, in the imagery of Daniel 3, fireproof — not necessarily physically, but spiritually, in terms of our resolve. We become vessels that put God’s glory on display and that further His cause on the earth. More on this in a few moments.

A fireproof resolve is unintimidated. It is unfazed by threats because it is confident in its stance and trusts God with the outcome.

Churchill's Resolve

At <https://bit.ly/33thQ9t>, you can hear the stirring speech Winston Churchill delivered at the House of Commons on June 4, 1940, on the heels of the Dunkirk evacuation. Interestingly, this recording was made nine years later, in 1949; and apparently when it was made, Churchill recited an abbreviated version of what he'd said in 1941. Had the Prime Minister's speech been recorded live, we would expect to hear feedback from Members of Parliament, as was depicted in the 2017 film *Darkest Hour*.

Concluding his speech, Churchill declared,

So, I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government—every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and the nation. The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength. [Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail.] We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and [even] if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Tyrants Must Be Fought on Many Different Battlefields

In our article last time, we began to review a sermon by Pastor Sam Jones titled “The Biblical Case for Religious Exemptions.” That post was titled “Understanding the Legitimacy and Limits of Various Spheres of Authority” and subtitled “The Biblical Case for Opposing Tyranny, Part “1.” Obvi-

ously, this is “Fireproof: The Biblical Case for Opposing Tyranny, Part 2.” I can hear it now! Someone surely is asking, *Would you please tell me how the Dunkirk evacuation and Prime Minister Churchill’s subsequent speech relate to religious exemptions?* We’re getting there! Consider first that common ground between the soldiers trapped at Dunkirk and the Christian soldiers standing against the “health” mandates of today includes these realities:

- 1) both are opposing tyranny, and
- 2) both are fighting for freedom and personal liberty.

To this two-item list let’s add a third and fourth:

- 3) A strong resolve never to give in is essential to victory. We have described such a resolve as *fireproof*. It is unintimidated. It is unfazed by threats. Churchill understood the importance of an unwavering commitment to keep fighting, and we must as well.
- 4) Finally, faith in God’s ability and willingness to bless our efforts to oppose tyranny is critical.

While generally speaking, civil disobedience has not been necessary for American Christians, this is changing. A godless government is prone to act *as* God rather than maintain order in accordance with God’s design and within civil government’s divinely delegated authority. Those who believe Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 offer no room for civil disobedience misinterpret these passages. Hear the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer on this matter at <https://bit.ly/3A8rmuy>.

God honors those who obey Him when the state demands actions or inactions contrary to His revealed will (see Exodus 1:15-21; Esther 4:13-16; Daniel 3:1-30; 6:1-28; Acts 5:12-32 — <https://bit.ly/3ruVk8b>). Further, the Lord honors and those who seek to hold the state accountable to divine authority. He does not always deliver, but as the three Hebrew men and the British naval officer affirmed centuries later (as we have indicated), the duty of the one opposing tyranny is to obey God and leave the results to Him. God will take care of His own.

Opposition to Tyranny: Thoroughly American

Rooted in biblical principles, America has a rich heritage of opposing tyranny and upholding liberty. At her inception and for several decades following, Americans far and wide understood what

liberty was, from whom it comes, what it costs, and the forces that threaten it. They also knew tyrants had to be opposed. Hear these insights from our nation's leaders.

- Thomas Jefferson declared, “Rebellion to tyranny is obedience to God.”
- James Madison said, “We are right to take alarm at the first experiment upon our liberties.”
- “A nation of well-informed men who have been taught to know and prize the rights which God has given them cannot be enslaved. It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins.” So said Benjamin Franklin.
- Patrick Henry knew exactly which conditions invited tyrants to do their worst. He said, “It is when a people forget God, that tyrants forge their chains.”
- A number of decades later, former slave and national spokesman Frederick Douglass observed, “The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

More recently, economist Walter Williams said this: “The moral tragedy that has befallen Americans is our belief that it is okay for government to forcibly use one American to serve the purposes of another—that in my book is a working definition of slavery.” However, sadly, widespread recognition and understanding of liberty no longer characterize the nation.

Here are several truths/principles to remember.

1. Even when it seems you're standing alone in opposing tyranny, you aren't. God is with you. Do not be discouraged. Recall that after the three Hebrew men were thrown in the furnace for disobeying King Nebuchadnezzar's order, the king peered inside the furnace and was amazed. He declared, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Look! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Dan. 3:24-25). Did Jesus show up in the furnace with the Hebrew men? Some believe He did. Regardless, we know He is with us as we rely on Him to enable us to do His will.
2. It always helps if you can take your stand with others who are like-minded.
3. Emotions often mislead us. Remember that when Elijah became discouraged and felt he was all alone in standing up for God, God said to him, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). Remember as well that Elijah became discouraged on the

heels of a great victory and a mighty display of God's power at Mt. Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:20-46).

4. God loves order, but He hates tyranny. God wants people to live in societies that are ordered but that also allow freedom and liberty. Consider the Ten Commandments. God's foundational laws are obeyed in society, people are free to work, enjoy the fruit of their labor, cultivate good reputations, enjoy family relationships and friendships, and remain confident about their safety. This is liberty. Americans in the past understood these realities.
5. As we affirmed in our last post and as Francis Schaeffer has indicated, government is never authorized to act *as* God. It is divinely authorized to act *for* Him to punish evil and commend those who do good, but it thoroughly abuses its power when it seeks to impose its authority in other spheres, such as ecclesiastical, family, and self or individual.
6. While the British Expeditionary Force retreated strategically at Dunkirk, they did not give up. In fact, history makes it clear that the Dunkirk evacuation steeled their resolve. They returned many times over to fight Nazi tyranny. The forces that retreated from Dunkirk were present at Normandy four years later, in 1944. They weren't the same men in every case, but they were the same military. A strategic retreat may at times be necessary to allow soldiers to regroup, but opposition to tyranny must remain strong, and the fighting must continue.
7. As Christians fighting for righteousness and liberty today in post-Christian America, we live among millions who have no idea what the words *But if not...* mean. In fact, a great many churchgoers don't know what they mean. We who *do* understand what they mean need to demonstrate their practical meaning to people inside the church as well as outside. Yes, we need strategies to increase biblical literacy in the church so churchgoers comprehend the significance of this and other biblical words and phrases, along with important biblical teachings, concepts, and ideas. But we also need to remember that, like Nebuchadnezzar, people who don't know the Lord may very well learn about Him as they watch us remain faithful to Him in the midst of the fire.
8. Battles are heating up. In an article in the *Washington Times* dated Saturday, October 2, conservative Christian statesman Dr. Everett Piper noted that "National School Boards Association declares conservative parents to be domestic terrorists." *Domestic terrorists* apparently are exactly what President Joe Biden and Attorney General Merrick Garland believe concerned parents really are. Here's the background. Don't be intimidated! Read "AG Garland Abuses Power He Doesn't Have to Threaten Parents." This insightful article is written by legal experts, and it concludes by saying that despite all the intimidation,

“parents need not be afraid. It is their constitutional right to push back in legal ways against schools teaching children critical race theory. Go forth to the school boards and make your voices heard.”

9. Be informed, be respectful, be clear, be tenacious, and be ready to make sacrifices for your children’s sakes and for the sake of your own liberty. Remember last week’s discussion about spheres or jurisdictions of authority. When civil government ceases to protect citizens’ rights and begins to bully churches, families, and individuals to force them to make decisions they alone are authorized by God to make, civil government has overstepped its authority, is acting illegitimately, and must be resisted.
10. When faced with a choice of obeying God or obeying the government, we as Christians must obey God. However, a biblical precedent does exist for a person of faith to appeal to the government for permission to act according to his or her conscience. When government allows a person to opt out of a mandate that would violate that person’s conscience, God has cleared a path down which the individual is wise to walk.

The Biblical Precedent for Religious Exemptions

Daniel 1 presents the biblical precedent. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah — Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, respectively — had been taken captive to Babylon from Jerusalem. They were placed in service to King Nebuchadnezzar, whose training program included a diet for the four men that violated their consciences. Verse 8 tells us that “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs [the one who had been given responsibility for the four men] that he might not defile himself.”

The Lord “had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs” (v. 9), a man who, understandably, feared for his life if those in his charge departed from the established protocol. Wanting a peaceful solution, Daniel proposed a trial period of ten days, during which he and his friends would be given “vegetables to eat and water to drink” (v. 12). The request was approved, and

at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹ Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore

they served before the king. ²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. ²¹ Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus (vv. 18-21).

Hear Pastor Sam Jones expound on and apply this passage in this four-and-a-half minute clip from his sermon, available at <https://bit.ly/350AiXq>. A video presentation of the entire sermon also is posted on this page.)

The Bottom Line

Christians must respect and obey all lawful and legitimate authority. Accordingly, they will rightly welcome a civil government's willingness not to force them to act in violation of their consciences. At the same time, they also must insist that it isn't government's job to *allow* people to operate according to their sincerely held beliefs, but to *protect* the people's right to do so, as long as their beliefs don't violate the rights of others.

Our resolve to contend unwaveringly for conscience rights and authentic religious liberty must be unbending, indestructible, and yes, fireproof. With God's help, it can be and it will be. We, along with the British naval officer at Dunkirk in 1940, echo the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego:

But if not...

We must *never* surrender on government recognition of God-given rights.

Why is this so important? Because the state isn't God.

God is.

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