

Christians And Government In Difficult Days

From the time of the early church how the church should relate to the state has been a question and though it is addressed in Scripture, it's outworking has been debated and discussed down the years. It is not a black and white issue and needs careful consideration. This is especially so in difficult days when the state is imposing upon the people in ways that are sinful and even oppressive. Certainly, the early church knew what this was like. Letters like 1 Peter are written to the church in exile, as it were. In the same way, the book of Revelation is written to encourage the church to persevere under a tyrannical government. The Apostle Paul writes 2 Timothy from prison. In fact, all the Apostles knew persecution from ruling authorities and, barring John, died a violent death.¹ Moreover, the history of Christians martyrdom shows a high percentage of those who went their deaths went for the reason of being enemies of the state.

In a post Christendom, even secularised, political era in the West particularly and as increasingly anti-Christian ethics are being made law, denying basic human rights and freedoms, we find ourselves needing to exercise theological muscles in this arena in order to think and act wisely and well. The days are coming, even here now, when Christians in the West will be considered not simply unloving but illegal. Therefore, as Christians try to think biblically about obedience to the government in difficult days, here are a few things to consider.

1. Have a posture of humble, joyful, voluntary submission before the Lord

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2: 5-11)

In terms of submission to authority our example is Christ. Philippians 2 shows his humble obedience to the Father. He is eager to glorify God if even obedience to God costs him his life. If we are Christians, we have the mind of Christ. This posture of humble obedience to God should be our attitude.

In doing so we also respect God's order in human authority structures that he has set in place: the home (Eph. 5: 22- 6:4), church (Hebrew 13: 17), and society (Ro. 13: 1-7, Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2: 13-17). So, we seek first how best to obey, not when we can disobey. When we obey human authorities over us *'as to the Lord'* we obey God.

In light of this and specifically in terms of government, to disregard them is to disregard God because God has put them in place to uphold law and order, which will include preserving life (Dan. 2:21; Romans 13:1, cf. Gen. 45:5). Hence, it is not first about their competency or even their morality, it is about respecting the office that God gave them. It is also not simply about outward conformity to government laws and mandates but attitude in speech and thought life. In Acts 23:5 Paul is before the High Priest Ananias. He doesn't realise who he is, and he speaks disrespectfully to the priest. In what appears to be almost an apology in the face of unjust treatment he quotes Exodus 22:28, “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people”². But going deeper still, Ecclesiastes 10:20 tells us, “Even in your thoughts do not curse the King”. Our attitude to authorities is a serious thing to God and we should be careful not only how we speak of government leaders publicly but also how we think about them privately. Irreverent thoughts lead to irreverent speech and actions.³

In addition, we should remember that a right posture of humble submission is a great witness to the gospel. Alexander Nisbet in his commentary on 1 and 2 Peter says this: “The dutiful

¹ See Fox's Book of Martyrs, Ch. 1: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/22400/22400-h/22400-h.htm>

² 'Revile' - literally, 'blaspheme' means to 'make light of', 'belittle'. Not simply a verbal assault but a failure to follow God's law. 'Curse' is a malignant word aimed at hurting and causing harm. So, cursing civil authorities and rulers shows contempt for them and therefore God – whose law they are charged with upholding. (See, *Motyer, Exodus, 240-1*. Also see, *Enns, Exodus, 452-3*)

³ The rest of this verse in Ecclesiastes 10:20 speaks of the consequences of this unwise path. ‘...for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter’. In other words, ‘the walls have ears’ and by some unthought of way it will get back to the ruler.

submissive carriage of Christians towards wicked magistrates is a special means of commending religion to the profane and the gaining of them to glorify God...”⁴

Biblical submission to government is also upheld in the 1689 London Baptist Confession: Chapter 24.3. (See also The Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 24):

“Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake”⁵

Ultimately, though, we are under the lordship of Christ (not earthly government) and that means we can submit to earthly institutions of authority (cf. wives to husbands, children to parents, church to elders) *voluntarily* and with *joy*, not under coercion (Matt. 5:11-12; 1 Peter 4: 12-13; Hebrews 10:34-35; Acts 5:41). John Piper helpfully comments about submitting to a state that persecutes Christians, “Since the state can only take our livelihood and our family and our lives, but not our joy, it is finally and decisively powerless to defeat Christianity. Every Christian that does not bow the knee to the state defeats the state eternally.”⁶

However, this kind of joyful voluntary submission comes from being sons that are free not slaves that are in chains. Jesus explains the heart of this in Matthew 17:24-27:

“When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “**Then the sons are free.** However, not to give offense to them, 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.”

Piper makes comment on this too:

“Must we pay the two-drachma tax? Must we? No. Not that kind of “must.” “The sons are free!” Free from that kind of obligation to human institutions. However, pay it anyway, Peter, so as not to give offense. The children of God are free from human institutions and relate to them on the basis of kingdom aims that do not come from this world. When we submit to a human institution, something totally different is going on than when the world submits. The children are free.”⁷

Being unjustly treated by the government will not send you to Hell. But being angry and bitter and having an un-submissive spirit will. So, we submit to government, yes. But as free sons of God not slaves in chains. Humble, joyful, voluntary submission must be our immediate and usual posture. If it is not, we are on shaky ground.

2. Know that there is a time for civil disobedience

“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5: 29)

However, there is a time when we must obey God rather than men. No authority, apart from God’s authority, is absolute. Men are sinful and governments can be corrupt and govern wickedly to varying degrees. If obeying means sinning, then we must not obey. This includes submitting to abuse. As CBMW have stated, “Abuse is not only a sin but is also a crime. It is destructive and evil. Abuse is a hallmark of the devil and is in direct opposition to the purposes of God.”⁸ This

⁴ Nisbet, 1 and 2 Peter, p. 91.

⁵ Also, with respect to the magistrate’s power to ban church assemblies for a limited time the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter said:

“It is one [appropriate and valid] thing to forbid [public church assemblies] for a time, upon some special cause, (as infection by pestilence)...If the magistrate for a greater good, (as the common safety,) forbid church-assemblies in a time of pestilence... it is a duty to obey him.”

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/sons-of-freedom-and-joy>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ CBMW statement on abuse: <https://cbmw.org/about/statement-on-abuse/>

means that if what the state mandates is asking us to actively sin or is an open abuse of human beings and basic lawful human rights even if it is in the name of justice or love, it may be right to resist. Complying with it might mean we are passively affirming the immorality of it.

Nevertheless, to help us decide when it is right to resist government and how we should resist, we need to know a several things...

Know the relationship between Church and state: Jesus is Lord over both. He appoints government and ordains authorities for law and order. But they do not have the right to coerce conscience or restrict or ban what the Bible says is good and necessary. So, there is a separation with some overlap. One day every knee will bow to Jesus (Phil. 2: 10-11) but until then there will be some conflict between Church and state.⁹

Christians are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt is distinct in its saltiness which must not be lost. But it has a preservative effect on all that it touches. Similarly, light is distinct to darkness, but light penetrates the darkness. This captures the distinctness and separateness that the church has with regards to the state and culture. That's separateness is to do with authority (with some overlap as above). But also, the separateness is to do with holiness. Nevertheless, this separateness should not lead to disengagement. In fact, there should be engagement with society and God's authority structures within, it in order to be an influence for good.

This means that Christians should be outspoken in condemning evil. Salt 'bites', as Martin Luther said. God ordains the state and family as social institutions to hold evil back and promote goodness. They must be preserved - but in order to act righteously and where that is lacking Christians should address it, as a kind of moral disinfectant.¹⁰

However, the church's mandate is to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations. This mandate is not *primarily* social transformation. So, Christians should always make sure they are a faithful *gospel*/witness in spheres outside of the church.

Know what subtle tyranny looks like: We must make no mistake in realising the spiritual warfare we are in (Eph. 6:10-20). We should be alert to the fact that those who are not for Christ are against him (Matt. 12:30) and the world will hate Christians because they first hated Jesus (John 15:18). We will be persecuted for his name's sake (Matt. 5: 10) and so we will suffer - at times under wicked governments.

Sometimes the state is obviously wicked and oppressive as we have seen in countries within Africa and in North Korea for instance. We know that fallen people are sinful and some are scheming and planning great evil within governments. We also need to recognise what *subtle* tyranny looks like. (See the subtle propaganda of the second beast in Revelation 13). It is often in the name of love but is a vehicle to destroy the nuclear family and the church (like the radical LGBTQ/feminist/BLM agenda). At a foundational level it is trampling the glory of God and destroying the idea of what it means to be human.¹¹ It impugns the creation order in the Scriptures: what it means to be image bearers - male and female, the institution of marriage between one man and one woman and sex within that covenant alone, the fruit of babies, the societal foundation of families, parental authority and patriarchal rule in the home, and the sanctity of life. The church must stand as a bastion of truth on these creation order issues.

Know our rights: We ought to know our rights in order to set them aside for the greater good like Paul (1 Corinthians 9) and Jesus (Phil. 2). But also we need to know our legal rights in order to invoke them for the greater good: like Paul asserting his Roman citizenship which forced an apology from the government for unjust punishment (Acts 16: 37- 38) and on another occasion where with the same action he avoided unjust punishment from the government (Acts 22: 25- 28).¹²

⁹ For a helpful discussion on Two Kingdom Theology and a Neo-Kuyperian view see Kevin De Young: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/two-kingdom-theology-and-neo-kuyperians/>

¹⁰ See Stott, Sermon on the Mount, 66. See also Carson, Matthew 1-12, 139.

¹¹ With regards to COVID, the same authorities that promote love and life are killing babies by the millions in the womb (in the USA alone 60million since 1973), and euthanising the old and the sick.

¹² With regards to COVID, some may argue that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada lists the right to freedom of conscience and religion and the right to peaceful assembly, (which that has been cited by government as permitting the rallies, protests, etc.) and yet is being restricted, to some degree, in an ongoing way with restrictions on families (and churches). We also have an emerging judicial consensus that is pushing

In addition, we should know our right of appeal to government and even that we can speak truth to power. Daniel and John the Baptist show the way in terms of truth speaking in the public arena. We must also appeal respectfully and yet strongly through writing to governors and asking for a demonstration of their justification in the action they are taking. The 'doctrine of the lesser magistrates' gives some structure and guidance for how this kind of resistance may work.¹³

Know the times (1 Chron. 12:32): Years ago, there was much less information available; people had to accept what they were told and trust the authorities and experts. Now, we have the internet through which we have access to information, both true and false. Theories abound and the internet fuels them. The attraction with the various theories and self-appointed experts on social media is that there is some truth in there that can appear to make sense of things. It appeals to curious minds which want a handle everything (Not that all curiosity is a bad thing, but the secret things belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29)!). This has to some extent increased unrest and distrust of government.

Know ourselves: We are quite an impatient generation - not good at waiting and doing without. Restriction is not so much in our Western vocabulary. We have known great freedom and quick gratification, and so with Verruca Salt from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, we sing "I Want It NOW"!

We are also *anti authority* in a significant way. In the home, church and society. We live in a self-defining age where subjectivism and a 'felt' needs mentality rules. A society where those who should take up leadership don't and those who should sit under authority, won't.

In addition, we must recognise our particular sinful propensities to these things. Individuals must ask: are the pride of impatience, anger and anxiety, attitudes and emotions with which I particularly struggle?

Know that we need both wisdom and prudence: Indeed, they dwell together (Proverbs 8:12). Wisdom contrives for the highest ends. It knows the heart of the matter and its goal. Prudence directs the most effective means to get to that end. Prudence restrains us from hasty judgement and actions (like Jesus in John 2:24-25). Prudence avoids premature danger (like Jesus hiding himself from the Pharisees when he knew their plans in Matthew 12:15). Prudence also preserves us from giving unnecessary offence (like Jesus in giving what is due to Caesar (Mark 12:17), or like Peter's instructions to honour all people and respect those in office over us (1 Peter 2:17)). The actions of Daniel in the Old Testament book are a model for us in how to wisely and prudently relate to a tyrannical ruler.

back on the infringement of basic liberties and an acknowledgement by some law officers that they won't enforce them. What started as an effort for a limited period to "*flatten the curve*" has morphed into an open-ended effort to "*save lives*" without clarity on what that actually means. If it is simply to stop the situation worsening and reduce the number of deaths, then that is good. If it is to stop all deaths completely, that is unrealistic and will harm (is harming) the health of society in multiple other ways if pursued. Suicides, crime, drug use, mental health issues, divorce and economic hardship have all increased.

Furthermore, early on nobody knew what we were facing, but now it is somewhat clearer and not quite what we thought. Vaccines are also here now. Though still serious, we have not had the millions of deaths that were predicted if we didn't do something drastic. However, some may argue the drastic measures are precisely why we haven't had the millions of deaths. Still, the broadcasted aim is to avoid overrunning the health system and cause other deaths through cancelled surgeries. Plus, there is evidence of 'long haulers' who are feeling side effects months after contracting the virus. This has all contributed to inconsistent policies and ongoing restrictions. So, it becomes hard to bind consciences regarding obedience to every regulation. John Calvin comments, "Every work, however splendid and excellent in appearance, is counted as sin, except it be founded on a right conscience; for God regards not the outward display, but the inward obedience of the heart." If we are unsure whether a particular act is lawful for us personally, we must not do it. Otherwise, we act not in faith and show no concern about obeying our Creator.

¹³ Two articles by Dr. Bradford Littlejohn are useful here: <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/resisting-the-powers-that-be-how-protestants-developed-a-resistance-theory/>
<https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christian-citizenship-and-the-rule-of-law/>

Know there is a time for everything: There is a time for war and a time for peace (Ecc. 3: 8). In this world, until God's peace and justice reign in the new world, Christians are called to spiritual warfare for the kingdom for the sake of peace. Physical warfare can be justified in self-defence as a last resort. But still for the sake of peace.

Also, there is a time to embrace and a time not to embrace (Ecc. 3:5). All our acts should be acts of love. In love we submit to the authorities over us. But one could argue that it would be unloving to embrace a sinful government mandate.

Therefore, it would be unfair to say every case of defiance is necessarily sin. It would depend on the details and the heart disposition of the one who primarily seeks to obey. Think of the speed limit and the spirit of the law as opposed to the letter of the law. In Central London, England, people drive over the speed limit, and no one is ticketed, because it keeps them in the flow of traffic and it would be more dangerous to drive at the speed limit. Or you break the speed limit because you are rushing your child to the emergency room and time is of the essence. The wiser and more compassionate moral option is to disobey the law in those cases.¹⁴

If, however, we choose to defy, we must be prepared to pay the price. So...

Know we must be of good courage and good conscience: The Lord tells Joshua to be strong and courageous as he takes ground for the Kingdom whilst obeying God's Word (Joshua 1:6- 7). It takes courage to stand on the Scriptures and take a stand for righteousness sake.

Having done our thinking, theologising and praying, we bring government mandates to the bar of Scripture and come to a decision based on faith in God and his Word on these matters as best we can see. Our conscience is clear before God because it is a well-informed conscience not one that has simply resisted the government because we think they are wrong or don't like what they are doing.

William Edgar's words on Calvin are helpful: "The conscience for John Calvin is a tribunal in the heart. Quoting Quintillian, he calls it an awareness of "a thousand witnesses" (3.19.16). As always, spirituality for Calvin has a God-ward reference. Whereas it is perfectly proper to claim, as did Paul, that we need to take pains to walk with a clear conscience "toward God and men" (Acts 24:16), that fundamental concern is for conscience to respect God alone. Were there no people on earth, our conscience would still be bound to God's bidding."¹⁵

Know who we are: Finally, if we do disobey, it should be with reluctance - as a last resort, with a grievance that it is necessary - and yet with zeal for God's glory and even the good of an oppressive or unwise government in mind. A kind of 'sorrowful yet always rejoicing' posture (2 Cor. 6:10) is fitting. Jesus went to the cross for the joy set before him, but with face set like flint. (Heb. 12:2; Luke 9: 51, cf. Isa. 50:7) He was neither flippant nor angry. We are not anarchists - we are ambassadors for Christ and citizens of heaven. Our call as Christians is to take up our cross and actively die; die to self, die for the good of others, and die for the glory of God - metaphorically and maybe even physically - neither as pacifists nor as vengeful activists who want to 'storm the castle'. We must remember who we are...in Christ.

¹⁴ When do government restrictions impede the church being the church or the family in an *ongoing* and *unreasonable* way then it would perhaps be unwise at best and immoral at worst not to resist, because God commands us to be the church and family, dwelling together as a display of love. With regards to COVID, we may then decide to comply with a three week 'circuit breaker' and not see anyone in our families (or church family) in our homes in order to flatten the curve. But if that were extended to the Christmas period we may argue that to *not* meet together as Christian families (including church family) in our homes in worship of our Saviour (after whom, and in whose name we celebrate Christmas) would be an overreach of the government's authority, which denies an individual family the freedom and right to gather peaceably. It could be argued that we ought to celebrate the birth of Christ - the incarnation - *together* as an act of love and worship...as family. We might argue that to submit to an order not to do this is neither good nor healthy and is against conscience. Some might think it prudent to keep family gatherings small while still allowing the family unit to meet. This is going to look different for different people as they make careful decisions. What we need between believers is love and charity toward people who may make a different decision than we would.

¹⁵ <http://www.wtsbooks.com/a-theological-guide-to-calvins-institutes-david-hall-peter-lillback-9781596380912>

3. Love each other

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

Remember in it all, the decisions we make impact others and our aim is love in all we do (1 Tim. 1:5) – even in how we relate to authorities. How are our words and actions a display of love for others: whether in obedience to government or in disobedience? How are our actions pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ as we take every thought captive to obey him? Are we fulfilling the command to do good to everyone (Gal. 6:5)? Are we bearing with others and bearing each other’s burdens (Ro. 14; Gal. 6)? Are we being patient with other brothers and sisters in the church? Also, are we being a good witness to our unbelieving friend or neighbour?

During a similar time to that which we currently face, Reformer Martin Luther proclaimed in a sermon entitled “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague”: “I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, He will surely find me, and I have done what He has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.” It is an act of love to want to preserve the lives of others.

Furthermore, part of loving each other well means walking in each other’s shoes and considering each other’s frames in the church.¹⁶ Also, remember the frames of those who govern, and pray for them. (1 Tim. 2:2) We who have received so much mercy should be abundantly merciful towards others. It will be harder for you to hate, disrespect or be angry with a person if you pray for their salvation.

Praying for governments is also historically practice in the church. The 1644 London Baptist Confession, No. 48, says: “That a civil magistrate is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; and that all lawful things commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord: and that we are to make supplication and prayer for Kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty.”¹⁷

Governments and authorities should not be automatically demonised across the board. Crises expose the limitations of fallen people.¹⁸ They might be unbelievers (the wicked in that sense), but

¹⁶ With regards to COVID, the older and/or more vulnerable may find it easier with the restrictions. They may be more frightened, feeling their fragility. They may feel the loneliness much more. But some older or more vulnerable folks are not of that opinion. They may not want their children and grandchildren’s livelihoods impaired by a shutting down of the economy. They may see biblical reasoning (as above) to resist mandates in certain circumstances.

This virus mainly impacts the elderly and vulnerable in terms of the worst effects. But as we ought not to idolise our children, we ought not to idolise the elderly and vulnerable. We take care of them, yes. We might prioritise them, yes. But this cannot be at the expense of everything else.

So, we must also remember the frame of the young. This is their time as it were. They are all about expanding and growing in these years. Marriages, houses, careers, families. They have energy and inventiveness and their risk taking (not recklessness!) is needed. Constant and inconsistent restrictions can be like putting a puppy in a cage all day long. It will go crazy and its growth will be stunted. The youth are the future homes, churches, and societies. They are the ones who will take on the baton of the gospel truth. That said, young people must learn patience and the meekness of wisdom. This is more valuable than all the gold in the world.

¹⁷ See also, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 23, “Of the Civil Magistrate”:

“It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honour their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates’ just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted...”

¹⁸ With regards to COVID, we have a case of global governments struggling to find the best way of dealing with an impossible situation, and they are making mistakes. Mistakes that all of us would surely make and worse. They are being criticised no matter what they do.

we must also recognise the common grace and wisdom that God gives for the good of society - even if it is not salvific. For instance, unbelieving rulers build hospitals. It is not from faith, but it is good for society. In the same way, unbelieving parents can love, care for and discipline their children and be good parents - not in the ways of salvation and the fear of God but still producing useful members of society. It is dangerous not to hold in tension both views of (i) a wicked (sometimes tyrannical) government and (ii) common grace in government, otherwise we may develop unrealistic perspectives and possibly a victim mentality.

4. Trust in the sovereignty of God

“Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.” (Hab. 1:5)

Relating to governments, especially in difficult days, is ultimately a true test of our trust in the sovereignty of God, his providence and the sufficiency of his Word. God ordains all things. And God often uses nations and nature to discipline his children. He ordains physical, psychological, spiritual, relational suffering to show his wisdom, grace and power (See the Book of Job). Furthermore, he can use something like a pandemic and political incompetency, and oppression, to bring people to their knees. There is a work of sovereign judgment and discipline going on in our particular day that we cannot figure out with any human intellect and wisdom (and all the theories that abound thereof). There are thousands of things we do not see flowing in and out of suffering all of which are designed by the one who has the power and understanding to make a universe with a word. So, faith in God and his sovereign grace is what we need. He has shown it in the cross of Christ. That is enough. We might not know all the reasons why we suffer but we do know the one who ordains the suffering and he is good. And where we cannot see how all the dots connect, let us be careful not speculate too much.¹⁹

Instead we need to see that judgement begins in the household of God (1 Peter 4: 17). So, *repentance* towards the one true authority is the *first* work for us - *not resistance* to his appointed earthly authorities. Pride can make us presumptuous and speculative. And so, we can too easily take up arms (or be up in arms!) against authorities wrongly - in retaliation not love. If we see that God ordains that ruling authorities exist, and he sets them in place, then we can trust that he is doing his church good even when those authorities sin against us. Paul applies Habakkuk 1:5 to the Jews of his day (Acts 13:41): the so-called people of God must repent. God disciplines his children for their good (Hebrews 12: 1-11). The result of discipline is ‘holiness’ and ‘the peaceful fruit of righteousness’ (Heb. 12:10-11). If we are trained by God’s judgement and discipline and repent of our sin, then having removed logs from our own eyes we will see clearly when to resist and our motive will not be vengeance but God’s glory. We will act in mercy for righteousness sake and desire for peace.

God desires to show mercy to Christians in our suffering (James. 5:11). And the mercy is a greater revelation of who he is. When God finally reveals himself to Job from the whirlwind Job says, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5).

So, dealing with government in difficult days calls for a greater vision of God and trust in his sovereignty not theirs (or ours), knowing that God works most powerfully when things look most dark. Just look at the cross. This will then result in patient, persevering, and faithful action. It will involve a posture of humble obedience to imperfect sinful authorities. But it might sometimes require resistance.

¹⁹ When God took everything from Job, God was still everything to Job. We are far too attached to our temporal privileges, pleasures and rights and not enough attached to that which is eternally ours in Christ. But it’s one thing to bless the name of the Lord at the beginning of a trial; it is another thing to do it as the suffering goes on and you cannot figure it out. The point is that for all Job’s righteousness and wisdom he didn’t have a clue how God was designing his suffering for His own glory and Job’s own faith. Yet Job’s posture at the end of the book was one of humble submission to the will of God and repentance for his self-righteous chafing against God’s tough providences.

