

# **Living the Life Amidst an Oppressive Government**

## ***Romans 13:1-7***

This message is not designed to talk about what the government should do, though that has its place, but rather it is what we ought to do as God's people, and in particular His true churches as it relates to our interactions with human, albeit God-ordained, government. Which, by the way, includes all governments, oppressive or not.

The Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Oxford English Dictionary, and Webster's 1828 Dictionary basically say, oppression is associated with tyranny, oppressors, taskmasters, slave drivers, heavy unjust burdens, even tax exactors.

What is or is not oppressive may depend on who you are talking to. I imagine that if I could talk to the millions of babies murdered in the womb, they would say a government who sanctioned such was oppressive to say the least.

The states of Rhode Island, Minnesota and Pennsylvania, 13 out of 50 states have recently "legalized" sodomite "marriage". Minnesota went so far as to saying that employees have no protection from the law for their jobs if they cannot recognize such "marriages".

The progression I foresee, unless God intervenes, is that sodomites will seek to overturn state laws against sodomy and sodomite "marriages". Then, federal government may allow religious toleration for a while, but before long, you will lose your tax exempt status, then, you can't deduct church offerings from your taxes, and then, you are not recognized as a church, but a rogue cult, an enemy of the state and a violator of human "rights". What do we do when the lines are clearly drawn and we may be called upon to give our lives for Christ by death by the hands of an oppressive government?

After the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to pen the doctrines for salvation, predestination, justification, sanctification, practical teachings in regards to the Christian's response to government. We are well equipped and armed,

if you will, with such powerful doctrines which are established upon our Lord God Omnipotent Who reigns by Whom we can do all things, even the most difficult and who saves us to the uttermost. ***Dan 11:32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.***

We want to consider three strategies in *Living the Life Amidst an Oppressive Government*: first, *Go Fight*; second, *Take Flight*; and finally, *Hold Tight*.

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## ***I. Go Fight***

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- A. I do not mean that we should fight against the government with an armed militia. We may be fighting against God, as Judah was admonished by Jeremiah concerning their demise by the hand of Babylonians, or possibly in our case Muslims, Marxists, ...
  1. ***John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.***
  2. ***2Corinthians 10:4-5 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;***
  3. Yeah, but, ...I will deal with the “yeah, buts” in a moment. ***Colossians 1:14-16 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: 15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every***

**creature: 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:**

4. Peter writes to people who were scattered across Asia Minor. These believers lived in potentially volatile social and political situations. The believers reading it were possibly under the rule of the emperor Nero. Either way they were driven abroad by the ruling authorities (Jewish authorities), and yet Peter writes the following: **1Peter 2:13-17 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king (person in position of power), 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. 17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.** Honor the king? We are not to be swayed by current socio-political events. Our allegiance is to Christ and as followers of Christ we are to submit ourselves to the existing government, even when the existing government is corrupt and oppressive (as it was in the days of Peter).

5. Yeah, but, what about Israel, the judges, David? The United States is not Israel, there is no other Israel, even the one now isn't under the same circumstances as the Israel of the Old Testament. Besides, Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world.
6. Yeah, but, what about the American Revolution? The argument in that day was that civil magistrates should be obeyed so long as "they do not grossly abuse their power and trust, but exercise it for the good of those that are governed" – it would seem the Holy Spirit would give such a qualification knowing the government oppression and persecution
7. Yeah, but, what about a tyrannical government with a Hitler at its head? The involvement of individuals such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer partnering with the German Resistance shows a rebellion over a leader that (and this is hard to say) was ordained by God. Bonhoeffer joined the resistance, plotted to overthrow the Nazi regime and was even executed for his involvement. God didn't bless their efforts.
8. Yeah, but, if our government declared martial law or monarchy, the law of my land allows me to resist with force (2nd Amendment). Some say the 2nd Amendment implies that such armed resistance should be within an organized militia (presumably under the authority of my state). The constitution may allow a person to be a sodomite and get married, but God does not allow it. God does not allow me to take up arms to overthrow

the government, so even if the Constitution says I can doesn't mean I can before God. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. He doesn't say the Roman government, but those individual human agents that God has placed in authority.

9. Do you see Paul - anywhere - preaching any kind of unlawful activity to depose Nero or Jesus trying to get Pilate removed from office? How about David taking matters into his own hands and killing Saul when he had opportunity?

10. It strikes me as rather easy to go out in a blaze of glory, firing on both barrels, shooting to the end. It is much harder to obey Christ by being willing to die for the cause of Christ, even in a slow process of torture. This strikes me as one of the hardest things to do, and yet many of the early Christians did this at the hands of Roman governors.

11. We are not pacifists:

a) Also, Jesus told Peter that two swords was sufficient, **Luke 22:38** ***And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough,*** as travelling was dangerous in that day due to thieves, murderers, etc...we can defend ourselves when our life is in danger.

b) Moreover, providing protection for our families is lawful and commendable **1 Timothy 5:8** ***But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the***

**faith, and is worse than an infidel.**

**B. I do mean we fight in this way... 1 Timothy 6:12**  
***Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.***

1. Prayer, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, ***I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*** Prayer and fasting,
2. Appeal to the authorities according to means God provides, Moses before Pharaoh, Daniel before steward about food, widow and unjust judge, Paul before Felix (**Acts 24**) part of our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment;
3. Confront authority respectively and submissively: Nathan before David, Daniel and Belteshazzar, John the Baptist before Herod (**Luke 3:19** ***But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,*** Paul about his flogging **Acts 22** as a Roman citizen, not a doormat.
4. Defy authority,
  - a) No authority of itself is worthy of our submission because they are filled by human beings, but the bottom line is that God-ordained this authority. It cannot command what God forbids or forbid what God commands.

b) Preach the Word of God: Peter and John as preaching in the name of Jesus, go to most public place and preach. **Acts 4:18-20**  
**18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.** Also, **Acts 5:27-29**  
**27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.**

c) Of course we could add other Scriptural examples of civil disobedience, such as the Hebrew midwives in ancient Egypt (**Exodus 1:15-21**) or Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in ancient Babylon (otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, **Daniel 3:8-18**), or Daniel in

Persia (**Daniel 6:1-23**). But the point is that in none of these cases is overthrow of the government involved. They disobeyed only at those points where the governing authority expressly required them to disobey God.

- C. Note Paul's disposition, posture, and demeanor of respect: **Acts 22:30—23:6** *On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them. 1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? 5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.* (Not sarcasm, the Roman government allowed Jewish authorities in matters of their law to deal with their people. Note, Galileo, provincial deputy of the Roman province of Achaia, **Acts 18:15** *But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.*)
- D. Carry out the Great Commission: **Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in*



heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

- E. *Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

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## **II. Take Flight**

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- A. *Hebrews 11:37-40 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about (fleeing, in hiding) in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*
- B. *Matthew 10:16-23 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; 18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. 19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which*

*speakech in you. 21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.* They were to shake the dust off their feet, cast not pearls before swine, and go to another place to preach, not to simply hide their under a bushel basket. We must still go into all the world and preach the gospel of Christ.

- C. Pastors are limited to some degree in this, because they are called to care for the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. Doesn't mean we can't, for Paul fled, but we should be very careful we don't neglect the flock God has called us to pastor. **John 10:12-13** *But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*

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### **III. Hold Tight**

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- A. It may be a rough ride. We need to hold tight to Christ, cleave to Him, abide in Him.
- B. Endure to the end and submit to punishment respectively, apostles John and Peter accepted punishment. **Mark 13:13** *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he*

**that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.**

- C. **2 Timothy 2:3** *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*
- D. **1Corinthians 10:13** *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Do we trust God in this or not?
- E. God forbid that we exhibit pompous attitudes because we don't experience oppression, many of God's people in other countries, can't and won't. An arrogant flippant attitude with our pseudo macho chests thrown out about obeying authority, even oppressive ones, our Baptist forefathers obeyed God in the midst of oppressive governments. This is the legacy God left in His Word, this is the legacy our Baptist forefathers have left us as well.

In closing, in addition to proper fight, flight, holding tight, we need to have proper foresight. They say that hindsight is 20/20, but hasn't always been my experience, and I know my foresight isn't 20/20. Yet, God's foresight is perfect, because He is truth, He is omniscient, He is omnipresent, He is omnipotent, and He is sovereign.

***Psalm 9:9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.***

God used Stephen's martyrdom by the Jewish authorities to bring Saul, later Paul, to Himself.

Any of these biblical responses may result in imprisonment, torture and death. Yet this is not a bad thing. Jesus commanded that we are not to fear those who can take our lives (**Luke 12:4-5**) for we know our true life is with God, in heaven. Jesus also commanded us to rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted for the sake of doing what is right, because this means that we will have a great reward for all

eternity (**Matthew 5:10-12**). Finally, to be martyred for the sake of our faith in Christ, and obedience to his will during the coming time of persecution means that we will receive a martyr's reward (**Revelation 20:4**).

***Ecclesiastes 5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.***

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