

Note: sometimes, when I research a topic I don't much like what I find. This is one of those instances. I am grateful to be an American, I admire the founding ideals of America, and I believe we are still the most just, most charitable nation on earth. I hoped to find biblical support for love of country. I did not.

Patriotism



John Trumbull's 1818 depiction of the Signing of the Declaration.

Today, the United States of America celebrates the 129th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a seditious document severing the relationship of the 13 British colonies with the mother country. Its 56 signers were very aware of the import of their actions, both historically and personally, as expressed by Benjamin Franklin: "We must all hang together, or, assuredly, we shall all hang separately." In signing the Declaration, they asserted "the Right of the People to alter or abolish" any form of Government that "becomes

destructive" to securing the rights of its citizens, and in so doing, they appealed to "Nature and...Nature's God," the "Creator," the "Supreme Judge," and "Divine Providence," while simultaneously violating the civic responsibilities commanded by the apostles. Our nation was founded on disobedience to both the King and to God, but the Signers appealed "to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of (their) intentions."

These men, mostly devout Christians, are celebrated as patriots, and counties, towns, and schools bear their names, but was their patriotism antithetical to their Christianity?

Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language defines *patriotism* as "the passion which aims to serve one's country, either in defending it from invasion, or protecting its rights and maintaining its laws and institutions in vigor and purity." In this issue of *Ekklesia Then & Now*, we will examine the biblical and ecclesiastical position on patriotism in the hope of clarifying the Christian's responsibilities today.

Then

The clear position of the New Testament and Ante-Nicene church was that we are (1) eternal citizens of God's Kingdom and (2) temporary residents (aliens) of the world and therefore of the nations in which we live.

Eternal Citizens

The religious leaders of first century Jerusalem wanted Jesus dead. He emphatically challenged their legalistic interpretation and implementation of Scripture and

threatened their position in Jewish society. Unable to execute Him under Roman law, they brought Him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea and demanded that He be convicted for heresy. Pilate was clearly perplexed and annoyed and would have loved to avoid the entire affair—he, like other Roman leaders, had no interest in Jewish law. He tried to pass Jesus off on Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, but when Jesus refused to answer Herod's questions, He was returned to Pilate, at which time he asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus' response is foundational to a proper understanding of Christian citizenship and patriotism:

"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice'" (John 18:36-37).

Jews, through God's covenant with Abraham, were already citizens by birthright, but others (Gentiles) had been excluded. Jesus came to extend God's offer of adoption to the entire world:

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Citizenship is one of the descriptors (among [many others](#)) applied to the Christian life. Through our faith in Christ Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection, we are naturalized citizens of God's Kingdom:

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

Peter uses the fact that we are not citizens of the world to urge Christ's followers be something different than a typical citizen would be:

"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

When a group of Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking Him about Roman taxes, Jesus replied, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*" Money is part of this world, and worldly debts should be paid. But Jesus added, "*(Render) to God the things that are God's*" (Matthew 22:21). Christians belong to God; we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23).

Early church writers reinforced the teaching of Jesus and His apostles:

- "...we have no country on earth, that we may despise earthly possessions" (Clement of Alexandria, [Paedagogus](#) III, Chap VIII, ca. 195)
- "But as those in whom all ardour in the pursuit of glory and honour is dead, we have no pressing inducement to take part in your public meetings; nor is there aught more entirely foreign to us than affairs of state. We acknowledge

one all-embracing commonwealth—the world" (Tertullian, *Apology*, Chapter XXXVIII, ca. 195)

Temporary Residents

Even though Christians are not citizens of the world in an eternal sense, we are undeniably citizens of the nations into which we are born, and the apostles unequivocally describe the appropriate attitude toward civil authority:

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves" (Romans 13:1-2)

As citizens of the Kingdom, we owe our love and loyalty to our adopted Father. As residents of a nation, we owe civic and some spiritual responsibilities:

1. We are called to recognize God's sovereignty over the affairs of human beings: *"For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God"* (Romans 13:1b).
2. We are called to pray for leaders: *"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity"* (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Note that Paul calls for prayers for **all who are in authority**, not just the leaders of our nation.
3. We are called to submit to our leaders: *"Remind (Christians) to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men"* (Titus 3:1-2).
4. We are called to respect our leaders: *"Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king"* (1 Peter 2:17).
5. We are called to be obedient to the laws of our nation: *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution"* (1 Peter 2:13).
6. We are called to pay our taxes: *"Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due"* (Romans 13:7).

Christians are obliged to honor and submit to human authority because (1) it is established by God and (2) we are to be blameless before men. Remember, the form of government Paul and Peter are referring to is despotism, the tyrannical rule of a single man and his appointed representatives who often unhesitatingly administered arbitrary punishment, including the barbarous execution of Christ Jesus Himself. In the Roman Empire, there was no recognition of unalienable rights to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to appeal his case to Caesar (Acts 25:11), but he could have had no illusions about receiving justice from Nero. To be sure, there were more enlightened emperors, but any magnanimity they displayed was usually based on self-interest.

While early Christian leaders acknowledged their civic responsibilities, their eternal Kingdom citizenship imposed limitations on participation in Roman affairs. The fact that Christians refused to worship the emperor-gods, declined military service, ignored traditional pagan holidays, and bypassed public festivals led to charges of anti-social behavior or, worse, treason against the empire. Early Christian writers vigorously defended Christianity against such charges:

- "Polycarp said, 'To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God'" (The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp, Chap X, ca. 135).
- "And everywhere we, more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by (Christ)...to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment" (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chap XVII, ca. 160).
- "...treason is falsely laid to our charge, though no one has ever been able to find followers of (traitors to the emperor) among Christians...A Christian is enemy to none, least of all to the Emperor of Rome, whom he knows to be appointed by his God, and so cannot but love and honour; and whose well-being moreover, he must needs desire, with that of the empire over which he reigns so long as the world shall stand—for so long as that shall Rome continue. To the emperor, therefore, we render such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone" (Tertullian, *To Scapula*, Chap 2, ca 212).
- "He might have bestowed upon His people both riches and kingdoms, as He had before given them to the Jews, whose successors and posterity we are; on this account He would have them live under the power and government of others, lest, being corrupted by the happiness of prosperity, they should glide into luxury and despise the precepts of God; as those ancestors of ours, who, oftentimes enervated by these earthly and frail goods, departed from discipline and burst the bonds of the law" (Lactantius, The Divine Institutes, V.23, ca. 310).

The early church's adherence to this dualistic eternal citizenship-temporary residency continued through the imperium of Constantine, although there were certainly misguided individuals and some Gnostic sects had a propensity for removing those Scriptures they disliked. Prior to Constantine, there were Roman Christians, Macedonian Christians, Philippian Christians, Asian Christians, Corinthian Christians, etc., but there were few, if any Christian Romans, Christian Macedonians, Christian Asians, Christian Bereans, or Christian Corinthians because the emphasis was on being Christian, not patriotism to the empire, the province, or the city. When Christianity was adopted as the state religion under Emperor Theodosius in 395, the situation changed as thousands of citizens were instantly converted by state edict, probably introducing the first nominal Christians. For most of the first three centuries A.D., being a Christian had been life-threatening, now it was the norm.

Now

Our attitude toward government and other human institutions is directly related to our view of God's Providence. If we truly believe that governments and leaders "*are established by God,*" do we have any right to oppose them, whether they are our own leaders and foreign leaders? The difficulty does not lie in accepting that George Washington was established by God but that Adolph Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, or Pol Pot were established by God, but there is no reason to assume modern tyrants are any worse than ancient ones. For some Christians, there is even difficulty accepting that Bill Clinton or George Bush were



established by God.

The Founding of America

Furthermore, there is an obvious conundrum. If all leaders and governments are established by God, then **both** King George III and Thomas Jefferson were established by God. It is easy, after the fact, to suggest that George III's divinely-appointed time for governing the American colonies was up and that Thomas Jefferson and other revolutionary leaders were appointed to establish a new divinely-established government. The irony lies in the piety of many of the American revolutionaries—if they had been godless insurgents, there would be no dilemma, but our forefathers cited divine authority, at least obliquely, for their actions. It might not be excessively cynical, however, to suggest that the Declaration of Independence uses Divine Providence as a pretext for doing what they wanted to do.

<u>Declaration of Independence</u>	<u>Commentary</u>
When in the Course of human events	• Emphasis on human events
it becomes necessary	• If God is in control, why is it "necessary"?
for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth,	• The "powers of earth" are the focus
the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them,	• Nature's God? What about Man's God?
a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.	• Are the "opinions of mankind" more important than the commandments of God?
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. --	• Rights are important, but responsibilities are more important. And what is the basis for the claim that "all men...are endowed...with (an unalienable right to) the pursuit of Happiness"?
That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --	• Biblically, governments derive their powers from God.
That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness...	• The "Right of the People to alter or to abolish" their government because of grievances, however justified they may be, is no where supported by Scripture.
The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries	• The British Empire was near its height at this time, so King George was

and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

comparable to Caesar. Scripture does not each that "injuries and usurpations" justify defiance of divinely-established authority.

To add to the irony, much of the American revolutionaries' grievances against George III surrounded taxation, as encapsulated in the famous phrase, "No taxation without representation." Lofty words indeed, justified from a worldly perspective, but early Christians claimed no right to representation in Caesar's imperial court.

One has to wonder what the result might have been had these American leaders issued a "Declaration of Dependence," acknowledging their dependence on God and calling for the citizens of the colonies to pray for King George and the future of America and reminding the Christians among them of their responsibilities to honor the king, pay their taxes without complaint, and obey the laws of the government. Tories were viewed as traitors to "The Cause," but perhaps at least some of them were trying to practice biblical principles.

God, Family, Country

One of the problems with modern patriotism is that it implies a competition—loving one's own country more than others—while the Gospel teaches all for all people, even enemies. Some consider patriotism a divine command, or at least a standard, but they twist the Scriptures to fit their argument. [One internet article](#), for example, compared love of country to love of family, claimed that "God gives us a 'natural affection' (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim 3:3) for those of our own flesh and blood..." Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3 are part of lengthy Pauline descriptions of sinful human behavior—past, present, and future—but no where does he ascribe 'natural affection' to family relationships. In addition, the concept of "natural affection," particularly by human fathers has been manifestly untrue for most of time and culture. Even in this country, it took child labor and protection laws to end the exploitation of children.

The author goes on to say that "God has also given us His moral law that commands family members to love, honor, and respect one another in a unique way." That is true, but if we have "natural affections," why is a moral law necessary? He claims that Christians "have a higher responsibility to their own family members (*cf.* Gal. 6:10)," but Galatians 6:10 reads, "*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*" The "household of faith" refers to fellow-Christians, not flesh-and-blood family members; hence, Paul tells us our good works should go to a believer who is not a relative before a non-believing relative. Blood may be thicker than water, but the blood of Christ is thicker than the blood of family.

The analogy of family to country fits, but this author's application does not. Paul teaches that "*if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever,*" (1 Timothy 5:8) but Jesus teaches that "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26). The difference comes back to what Jesus, the apostles, and the Ante-Nicene writers taught about eternal citizenship vs. temporary residence. Just as we have civic responsibilities, so too we have familial responsibilities, but both of these pale in comparison to our primary loyalty to God.

Finally, the author claims that "those of our own community, state, and nation are our first and most present neighbors to whom we owe our love," but Galatians 6:10 also suggests that our good works should go to an Iranian believer before an American non-believer. In all cases, the focus is on **people**, not nations.

Pledge of Allegiance



A major expression of American patriotism is embodied by the Pledge of Allegiance, and when the Ninth District Court ruled that the Pledge violated the "Establishment Clause" of the U.S. Constitution and could therefore not be recited in public schools ([Newdow vs. U.S. Congress, et al](#)) in 2002, the cry from many Christian leaders was even greater than that surrounding Judge Roy Moore's defiant support of the Ten Commandments in his Alabama court. Michael Newdow, the atheist who claimed his daughter was being damaged by reciting the Pledge because of the "under God" phrase, even reported receiving "personal and scary" threats. Condemnation of the Court's decision was nearly unanimous and prompted public displays, including a mass recitation by the U.S. Senate, supporting the Pledge. Jerry Falwell said it was "probably the worst ruling of any federal appellate court in history." In 2004, the Supreme Court overturned the Ninth District Court's decision based on a jurisdictional technicality, evading the issue of the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance ([Elk Grove Unified School District vs. Newdow et al](#)).

Even though the Supreme Court punted, I am forced to conclude that the Ninth District Court may have been right, although perhaps for wrong reasons. Tertullian put it well: "...it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion—to which free-will and not force should lead us—the sacrificial victims even being required of a willing mind" (*To Scapula*, Chap 2, ca 212).

It was reported Michael Newdow's young daughter (the pretext of his suit) was a Christian, that the "under God" phrase bothered her not at all, and that she was dismayed to be at the center of his philosophical warfare, but that is beside the point. If anyone is offended by the "under God" phrase, it is inappropriate to coerce a confession to which the individual does not subscribe. Not only is it religious bullying, it belittles faith in God by becoming a rote phrase undoubtedly unnoticed by most of its recitors.

The "under God" phrased was added to the Pledge in 1952, in the midst of the Cold War to contract the United States with the godless Soviet Union. But according to Scripture, the Soviet Union was no less "under God" than the United States. The phrase can be viewed as a proud affirmation of God's Providence, but it can also be viewed as an arrogant claim of exclusivity. A "God's on our Side" kind of attitude when it ought to be "We're on God's side."

When I attend our church's annual picnic today, I will do so to be with fellow-believers who share both the grace of God in the salvation through Christ Jesus, and who have been materially blessed by being placed in the United States of America by that same God. I will do so to exhibit patriotic spirit, but in the root sense of the word, which comes from the Greek, **pater** (father). Jesus said, "*Do not call anyone*

on earth your father; for One is your Father (pater), He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). Only our heavenly father is worthy of our patriotism.

[I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb](#)

Ray Boltz

Chorus:

I pledge allegiance to the Lamb
With all my strength
With all I am
I will seek to honor His commands
I pledge allegiance to the Lamb

Discussion

From a Reader in Delaware

Dick, your research, your comments, and your well considered persuasion are admired and appreciated. Nonetheless, I, for one, cannot fully accept all that you laid out for us. Don't misunderstand, there is no argument with your scripture references, and with your interpretive contention.

It is like a tenet of the Church of Christ that some would say is not open to discussion, it just is. At the same time you know in your heart you cannot accept it or completely agree. No condemnation for those who do, but not for me.

It would be difficult for me to completely give up what I believe about this country and how I value it no matter the criticism abroad. I would give my life for it if called upon to do so. I made the offer for 26 years in the military.

DS: After I responded, reiterating that I believe the United States is still the best model Man has created for caring, equitable governance, the reader added the following:

I wouldn't go so far as to say my country, right or wrong. I could not voluntarily defend a country that was ruled by people like Saddam, etc. And maybe it's naive but I don't believe our government has gone that far even if the Bush haters believe it so.

No, patriotism for me is the good old definition by Merriam Webster: devoted love, support, and defense of one's country; national faithfulness.

And of course nothing over my faithfulness to God!!!! I would pray that I'm strong enough to stand by that.

From Adam:

Thank you for having the courage to write these things. It is becoming increasingly difficult to speak truth about our patriotism, and especially among Christians. I pray this article goes a long way to begin a much needed discussion on Christian allegiances to the nation-state.
Grace and Peace.

From Robert:

Thanks for a well-thought out article on patriotism! The area I find fascinating is the insistence that the founding fathers were so Christian, well kinda. A biographer of Benjamin Franklin said Ben changed sacred to unalienable. The founding fathers would also be considered pretty free thinkers in the Unitarian tradition and even some with no religious convictions whatsoever. It is disturbing to realize that our "enemies" in the Iraq war are very committed to their religion! You have hit on a thought provoking topic that all Christians should think about. I hear so much of our "Christian" nation and the leaders using this as a basis for power. I am grateful to be born here and grateful to this nation, but it is clearer to me that my allegiance is to Christ - have a great 4th!

[DS comment: It's ironic that Robert mentions Ben Franklin here, given that I commented on Franklin in this issue of ET&N. We have tended to mythologize our American forefathers and made them almost biblical characters. The fact is that were men and women like us, thrust into extraordinary times and susceptible to sin just as we are.]

From Daryl in Texas:

Excellent article, Dick! I've often said that the only difference between a "rebellion" and a "revolution" is that the "rebels" are defeated and the "revolutionaries" win!

From Alphia:

Dick, I appreciate your excellent documentary on "Patriotism". I have also studied how Peter handled the question and find no word to justify our First Patriot acts should be to any other Nation, but to our "Citizenship in the Kingdom of Christ". (Col.1:13). I would further note what Peter (who once lifted sword to protect physical Jesus), said about the sword after Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit? For what it may be worth here is a brief of my study. Peter preached the gospel of forgiveness, compassion, help and prayers for his enemies for those who were against the crucified Christ. (Acts 2:17 ff, 3:11 ff.). He made no effort to physically destroy Christ's enemies, although he said that unbelievers would be cut off. (Acts 3:23). He left all vengeance to the Just Judge. He made no effort to physically protect himself or the brethren when persecution came. (Acts 4:1-3, 17, 21; 5:40). Instead of striking back in any physical way, he rejoiced that he was "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Savior." (Acts 5:41). Peter taught that: Christians must and will suffer, if necessary, but told them NOT to return evil for evil; instead, give a blessing. (1 Pet. 2:19-23; 3:9; 4:13-19). He told Christians suffering under Roman persecution, to remain in submission to Rome. He did not advocate rebellion against the pagan, persecuting dictator. (1 Pet. 2:13-23). He did this in spite of the fact that the state was punishing doers of good instead of doers of evil, as you so eloquently explained. What this Scripture teaches is, render to a government even though it may be pagan and oppressive, BUT render to God's will FIRST. It is recorded that; "Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29). AND, "Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God". (Acts 4:19). Peter always put God's rule or requirements FIRST, with due respect.

From Rob in Georgia:

On Patriotism and the efforts of our Founding Fathers...I can't tell you how much I have struggled with this issue. I absolutely agree that as Christians, our goal is not to establish God's kingdom by force, nor does that Kingdom exist through political means. However, in this world, we are often propelled to make decisions that result from a calculus of means and ends. As Edmund Burke

said: "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing." Does this always require violence? No, but sometimes, although hopefully rarely, I can see that it is required. The question we have to ask ourselves from time to time is: "when do we stop doing nothing?" as other people suffer by the hands of the wicked?

Let's test the conclusion about always submitting to the authorities. You quote:

5. We are called to be obedient to the laws of our nation: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Peter 2:13).

The Nazi's acquired their power through political means. They didn't mount an armed revolution. They didn't attack Germany from outside and take it by force. It would be hard to argue that they were not a legitimate political authority.

But who better represents one concerned for the nature of God and His kingdom: A German Lutheran who unquestioningly followed the dictates of his Fuehrer to dispatch Jews to the gas chambers of Dachau or Auschwitz; or Oscar Schindler, who directly opposed the leadership of the legitimate authority over his country at the loss of his own wealth and at grave risk to his own life to save the lives of as many as he could?

When does one political authority have the right to oppose the actions of another political authority?

[DS: There are times when following God's commands in a fallen world leads us into apparent conflict. This was certainly the case in Nazi Germany, where one would have to choose between submitting to authority or respecting life. In such cases, it strikes me that it is a matter of determining which of God's laws takes priority. In Nazi Germany, the Hitlers actions were clearly in direct opposition to God's precepts. The necessary conclusion is that the authority of Nazi German leadership did not come from God (since He can not contradict Himself). A similar line of reasoning does not follow in the case of 18th century England and King George.]

What does it mean that God establishes all authority? Is the establishment a First cause or an Efficient cause? Or both? Does human intention have any effect on the establishment of authority? How are the two related? Does this only apply to kingdoms, or does it apply to constitutional federal republics? If it does apply to the latter, and I think it does, does that mean that we Christians shouldn't vote or participate in any level of government? After all, if God has already chosen our President and members of Congress beforehand, then why vote? The decision has been made. Furthermore, why attempt to impose our will on God's providential plan through political participation and be at odds with Him? (That sort of reminds me of the hyper Calvinist argument that we shouldn't even attempt to spread the Gospel.) A number of Christians have promoted that idea throughout history, including some of the Restoration Movement leaders like David Lipscomb. They believed that the only participation a Christian could have in any civic life was to live at peace with everyone (very noble) and pay taxes. Nothing more. Nothing less.

[DS: This issue has, of course, been debated among Christians. While there is disagreement, I find the principle pretty simple: respect for authority not only include human leaders but also the institutions of government (as Rob implies). To fail to vote or to serve when gifted to do so is a profound expression of disrespect for those institutions. To me, however, this does not include attempts to force Christian morality on the entire population. The Gospels hinges on freedom, and this implies to freedom of belief, but also of unbelief. Our role as Christians is not to force others to live in a certain way, but to live in that way ourselves to demonstrate the efficacy of God's principles.]

Does God have to submit to the Establishment Clause? ;)

If you read the letters of some of the Founding Fathers, you find that they struggled with the issue as well. For instance, John Addams, a devout Christian, represented the British soldiers in the trial following the Boston Massacre, and he regularly harped on his cousin, Sam Addams, for behaving like a common thug. In fact, it was John who persuaded Sam to give up essentially a terrorist campaign and conduct his separatist motivations, at least, respectfully. However, ultimately John was persuaded to join the Revolution. Why do you think he did that? What convinced him that the Revolution was in order? What tipped his hand? Would you do it differently if you were in his place?

To answer the questions you posed about the intellectual framework underpinning the Declaration of Independence and its relation to God's commandments, I suggest reading [How the Scots Invented the Modern World](#) and [The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism](#) to get an understanding of the 17th & 18th century thought processes that lead to the Declaration of Independence and the consequent evolution of America. It contained several theological strains. It doesn't justify, perhaps, the behavior of our Founding Fathers, but it does explain how they came to their conclusions in the face of scripture. The words used in the Declaration do not mean what they sound like they mean at face value. They were loaded with philosophical and theological baggage nearly 200 years old. It really must be read in its full historical context as the Framers intended the message to be understood by students of history. They really didn't write that article to the king of England, (regardless of the legend about the flourish in John Hancock's penmanship), who was an idiot and wouldn't have understood it anyway. They wrote that article to the World to state that they had a very real intention of ushering in a new age of government, and to declare that the independence that they had already established as legitimate forms of political authority was from that point forward secure and absolute. George and Parliament were merely their couriers in history.

I'm not so sure it really makes sense to pin the whole motivation on taxes, but of course they were a large motivation complicated by the brutal methods of colonization developed in Ireland and then imposed into the Americas. Read the Declaration of Independence (I keep a copy along with the Constitution in my travel bag). "Taxation without representation" is mentioned only once. The other complaints are in regard to the brutality of a phony king (not only was King George crazy, he essentially assumed powers that were not allocated to him by constitutional mandate. He was a puppet leader for those in parliament who wanted to restore the leadership of the British Commonwealth to the throne.).

[DS: Rob is correct that the interests of the founders, who largely represented the intellectual class of colonial America, went well beyond taxation and that the Declaration was written more as a justification for the World than for the King himself. For the average citizen, however, the loftier principles enumerated in the Declaration were esoteric concepts, and for most it was, as it usually is, the pocketbook that served as the most potent motivation. That the founders even used "no taxation with representation" at all demonstrates an incendiary intent, since the British Parliament offered colonial representation. Parliament also made an attempt to accommodate colonial sensitivities by replaced "internal" taxes with "external" taxes at Benjamin Franklin's suggestion, only to have colonists revolt against these taxes (i.e., the Boston Tea Party). It is also a fact of history that American colonists incurred far less taxation than the average British citizen, including other British colonies). As a whole, it seems, Americans wanted no taxation at all.]

In my own study, I'm not really sure that England had as much legal control and legitimate authority over the colonies as we often assume. In the minds of the colonists, the behavior of Parliament and King George III bordered on treasons in their own right. They regarded the behavior of these institutions not only as illegal and unconstitutional, but acts of war themselves. Were the Americans ultimately revolting against a legitimate authority or was their revolt in actuality a self-defense against something of a foreign threat? 225+ years later, it's kind of murky. In some sense, both were the case. Many of the actions taken by the state legislatures indicate that

such was their level of understanding about the legitimacy and sovereignty of their own governments. For instance:

"He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:"

"For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:"

"For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:"

[DS: Legitimate points. The crux of the issues may come down to the phrase, "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," expounded in the Declaration itself seems to be in direct contradiction to Scripture (*"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God"* - Romans 13:1). In our republic, that authority is expressly given to the people through duly-elected representatives, but in creating our nation, the founders may have violated God's principles. As I said in the issue, I appreciate the ends but question the means.]



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, [post a message](#) so we can all share in the discussion!

NEXT ISSUE: Me, Myself, and I

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