

**Sermon Notes: “Christian Civil Disobedience -- Is It Ever Right To Disobey Civil Government Rulers?”**  
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Romans 13:1-6: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.”

Evil civil government cannot be “ordained of God” in any sense other than disease and natural disasters are: “So are fevers, plagues, fires, floods and the like, and yet Almighty God not only permits, but requires us to use all prudent methods of resisting and stopping their fury, but is far from expecting that we should lie down, and do nothing to save ourselves from perishing in such calamities. So likewise are robbers and cut-throats God’s judgments, but this doth not prove that you must submit yourselves and families to be ruined at their pleasure. So again are inferior magistrates, if they make use of their power to fall with violence upon their neighbors, and attempt to take their lives, or the ruin of their families; and yet they may be resisted, and their illegal violence repelled by violence. And so, lastly, are foreign enemies and invaders, always reckoned amongst God’s judgments, and yet there is no necessity, I hope, of tamely submitting ourselves to them, and no argument against the lawfulness or honorableness of resisting them.”

‘There is no power but of God.’ This is true, whatever sense we attach to the word "power." All physical power—all executive energy, in every department of creation, is from God. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28.) In this sense the power of evil beasts and even of the devil, is from God. "By Him all things consist," (Col. 1:17.) Again, if we understand by "power," the possession of the reins of government, it is, certainly, through Him that kings are permitted to occupy their thrones and that, whatever the steps by which they may have succeeded to the seat of authority.

“Pharaoh was "raised up" in the course of that providence which controls all the affairs of men: Rom. 9:17: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.” God "gave the kingdom" to Jeroboam, I Kings 11:31: “I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee:”. The same hand "raised up" Cyrus, Isa. 44:28: “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure” and our Lord expressly declares to Pilate, the unholy Roman governor, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given to thee from above," (John 19:11.) Even the devil has "power," in this sense, from God. Does Paul mean no more than this? Assuredly he means something far different. This clause assigns a reason for that hearty subjection which the apostle had just enjoined. But, surely, the mere fact that one possesses "power," can be no reason why his claims should be acknowledged, and his laws conscientiously obeyed. If so, the slave—ay, the slave who has been stolen from his own land and ignominiously held as a chattel—would be required to admit, as from God, the validity of his master’s claims. To throw off his chains, and make his way to his native home as a freeman, would be rebellion against God. No doctrine could be more agreeable than this to tyrants, and to all the panders to unholy power; for, if this be Paul’s meaning, there is no despot, no usurper, no bloody conqueror, but could plead the divine sanction, and, more than this, the devil himself could lay the teachings of Paul under contribution to enforce his pre-eminently unholy authority. An interpretation which leads to such monstrous conclusions—that would bind the nations to the footstool of power with iron chains, and utterly crush every free aspiration—that would invest with the sanctions of the divine name the most flagrant usurpation and the most unrelenting despotism—stands self-condemned.”

“ And this may serve to explain yet farther in what sense these higher powers are from God; namely, as they act agreeably to His will, which is, that they should promote the happiness and good of human society, which Paul all along supposes them to do. And consequently, when they do the contrary, they cannot be said to be from God, or to act by His authority, any more than an inferior magistrate may be said to act by a prince’s authority, while is acting directly contrary to the will of the prince.” — Benjamin Hoadley, *The Measures of Submission To The Civil Magistrate* (1710) available at [www.swrb.com](http://www.swrb.com)

**Scripture Quoted In The Sermon — Please Study (in order as quoted):**

**Jn. 1:3**  
**Col. 1:17**  
**Ex. 9:16**  
**Jer. 50:41**

**Acts 13:22**  
**Rom. 13:8**  
**Hos. 8:3-4**  
**Acts 17:28**

**Rom. 9:17**  
**I Kings 11:31**  
**Isa. 44:28**  
**Jn. 19:11**

**Dan. 3:18**  
**Acts 5:26-29; 12:21-23**  
**Prov. 9:10; 8:15-16**