

The Case for the American Revolution from Romans 13



This year we will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the coming of the Mayflower with the Pilgrims, who settled in Plymouth in November of 1620. It is important to note that the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans of Boston who came in 1630 were two distinct groups. The Pilgrims were English Separatists, having separated from the Church of England. The Puritans were loyal to the Church of England. Both wanted to reform the Anglican Church; however, the Pilgrims thought it was hopeless, so they left the established church to begin their own church.

The first church started in New England was in Salem, as the Pilgrims just relocated an already established church to Plymouth. Francis Higginson, Salem's founding teacher, was a Puritan Church of England minister who felt the church needed to reform to be more aligned with Scripture. Being a Puritan, he was not seeking to separate from the church. When he left England for the New World and the coastland of England was disappearing over the horizon, he said,

We will not say, as the separatists were wont to say at their leaving of England, "Farewell, Babylon!" "farewell Rome!" but we will say, "farewell, dear England, farewell, the Church of God in England, and all the Christian friends there! We do not go to New-England as separatists from the Church of England; though we cannot but separate from the corruption in it: but we go to practice the positive part of church reformation and propagate the gospel in America." (Cotton Mather, *Great Works of Christ in America*, 362)

So, from very loyal beginnings, loyal to the King, loyal to England, and loyal to the Church of England, 150 years later the American Revolution was under way. Last week, the preaching was from Romans 13:1–7, which begins, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). If Christians are to submit unto the governing authorities, how could they revolt against the King? We are going to address that issue today. I am going to share the biblical reasoning of the Christians in those days. I will share the arguments from a sermon preached on *Romans 13:1–7*, on January 30, 1749, in the west meetinghouse of Boston, Massachusetts, by Jonathan Mayhew. According to William S. Baker and Samuel T. Logan, in their book, *Sermons that Shaped America* it was this sermon from Romans 13 that was "at the heart of thoughtful justification for Christian support of the American Revolution," (page 146).

Think about it! How could the colonists rebel against the King, based upon Romans 13? Yet, the Christians in that day did rebel against the king, also based upon Romans 13!

This is our second message upon the same text, Romans 13, which gives God's blueprint for an orderly civil society that is just. According to God, what does a just society look like? It has a benevolent authority with those in power seeing themselves as God's agent to administer justice, by rewarding the good and punishing the evil. Like most things God commands us to do, we often do not follow through very well. The result of failure in following Romans 13 is injustice. We spent last week explaining the text, explaining how, when we fail to keep it, repentance is needed, and a new desire to walk in obedience is in order, that we might seek justice for the oppressed and rectify the wrongs done. We also spent time in explaining how some of those oppressed, do not want anything to do with God's blueprint in Romans 13 and thereby, outright reject it.

Sermon handout: Bible Baptist Church of Galway, Galway, NY, Pastor Wayne R. Brandow, Oct. 11, 2020

Today we are going to look at Romans 13 and how it was used to justify the American Revolution. Remember, this justification came from a New England culture steeped in the Scriptures. Pilgrim and Puritan alike sought to live all of life to the glory of God. Ministers often led the way championing the Patriot cause. How could they rebel?

Text: Romans 13:1–7

Table 1. Romans 13:1–7

<p>¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.</p> <p>² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.</p> <p>⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.</p>	<p>The authorities are established by God.</p> <p>They have legitimate power; therefore, submission is expected by God.</p> <p>Rebels can expect judgment</p> <p>God-given guideline for rulers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward the good (the just) • Punish the unjust <p>Give to all their just due. (Justice for all).</p>
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A brief word about using history in a sermon

The Bible is chalk full of history

- In it we learn about individuals: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Samuel, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Martha, John, Paul, etc
- In it we learn about events: creation, fall, flood, the exodus, fall of Jerusalem, birth of Christ, (death, burial & resurrection of Christ), Pentecost, etc.
- We learn about nations and cities: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, etc.
- The book of Acts is a historical book (so are Genesis through Esther), in Acts the story is not finished, we (as the church) finish the story. Church history is about God. History is His story!
- The New England and early American history contain church history, as well as God's working in a nation's life

Why was there a change in loyalties among New England's ministers?

- Puritan ministers were uniformly Church of England men who wanted to reform the church. As they were not in conformity with prescribed practice of the Anglican church. They were part of English non-conformity, along with Separates (Pilgrims), Independents (Congregationalists) and Presbyterians.
- Puritan ministers still saw themselves as church of England men

- Living in New England gave them the freedom to practice Puritan non-conformity as the King and Bishops who had persecuted them were over 3,000 miles away, separated by a vast ocean
- Puritan ministers in New England began to practice congregationalism rather than an episcopal church government with Bishops over them
- Their goal – to fashion a Biblical society under God with Church (minister) and State (magistrate) working together to create a “new Israel,” seeking God’s blessing
- They were glad that both the King and Bishops left them alone to worship and govern themselves as they wished

England	King	New England
<p>Persecution of Puritans</p> <p>Archbishop William Laud (1633–1645)</p> <p><i>Samuel Rutherford Puritan minister wrote Lex, Rex (1644) Law is King!</i></p>	<p>James I (1603–1625)</p> <p>Charles I (1625–1645) <i>beheaded!</i></p> <p><i>English Civil War (1642–1651)</i></p>	<p>Pilgrims to Netherlands 1607</p> <p>Pilgrims to Plymouth 1620</p> <p>Salem 1626 (trading center)</p> <p>Puritans to Boston 1630</p>
<p><i>No King</i></p>	<p>The Protectorate under Cromwell (1653–1658)</p>	
<p>Persecution of Puritans</p> <p>1660-1672</p> <p>Bunyan imprisoned (a Baptist)</p> <p>1662</p> <p>2,000 Puritans ejected from their pulpits</p>	<p>Charles II (1660–1685)</p> <p>James II (1685–1688)</p>	<p>Sir Edmund Andros Governor of New England 1682–1689</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take away charters • Heavily taxed the people • Restricted town meetings • Establish Church of England Worship <p><i>He was out to destroy the New England way</i></p> <p><i>He was New England’s worst nightmare!</i></p>
<p>Act of Toleration, 1689</p>	<p>William and Mary (1689–1702)</p>	
		<p>Mayhew’s sermon, 1740</p>

- New England Puritan (Congregational) ministers no longer identified as loyal Church of England men after 1662 (The Great Ejection in England)
- Sir Edmund Andros, **the end of self-rule, the end of their Commonwealth for God** (for a time) during his administration as Governor

- *The English crown and Church of England were interfering with their worship of God (about 100 years before the American Revolution)*

How did Jonathan Mayhew find support for the American Revolution in Romans 13?

Table 2. Mayhew's interpretation of Romans 13:1-7

<p>¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.</p> <p>² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.</p> <p>⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.</p>	<p>Mayhew's argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is Paul writing to? Is it someone who does not think he has to obey an earthly king because he has God as his king? (a Jewish conceit, no king but God) • Paul wanted to convince such a one that earthly kings are ordained of God. They are His servants (even pagan ones) for the welfare of society, to reward good and punish wrongdoing. • Even Jesus said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. (coin in fish for tax) • Authority structures are good. They are God's idea. • Be subject to "Higher powers" (KJV, 1611), i.e. those over you <p>Key question – to what extent should you submit? Should it be unlimited? Is there any time you should not submit? It sounds like an absolute, every case submission. But is it really?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything." (Eph 5:24). In everything? A contemporary illustration – what if the husband says to his wife, "We are running low on cash. Put this gun in your purse and go down to the bank and get some money." Should she rob a bank? It says, "in everything." • There are places to drawing the line when it comes to submission. <p>Mayhew asked another question. What kind of higher power is being described?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is one that rewards good and punishes bad • It is one that is God's servant • It is one whom you can obey with a good conscience • It is one to whom honor is due • If the one in power rewards evil and punishes good • If he is not one you could obey with a good conscience because what he is asking of you is flat out wrong • If he does not deserve honor because he is unjust and wicked • THEN he is NOT God's servant. He is the devil's servant! • Such a one needs to be resisted, not obeyed.
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- Mayhue said to obey a king because of the divine right of kings is nonsense. A hereditary king that is wicked is to be opposed. The King is not law (rex lex) the law (God's law) is king (lex rex)!
- However, generally, God has instituted authority structures in the home and society to ensure peace. We need to respect authority. [The place to learn it is in the home, "Obey your parents" the 5th Commandment].

Biblical support for defying an unjust authority that Mayhew did not mention.

- Peter, "We must obey God, rather than man" (Acts 5:29)
- OT – God raises up deliverers. What do they do? Overthrow unjust oppressive governments.
- NT – the supreme usurpation, Christ overcoming Satan (Gospel)

Practical lessons for us today in this time of unrest in our country

- As a good citizen, we can vote and do our part to ensure just leadership. Political campaigns focus on image. That is all fluff. Look for the substance. Where will their policies take the nation? There is also more than the President to vote for. He is just one piece of the puzzle. With the balance of powers in our country other elected officials matter too.
- We can pray that God would give us leaders modeled after his plan in Romans 13
- We can rest confidently, that no matter what the outcome, we need not be characterized by fear. God still is in control, and He cares for His flock. He loves you and will be with you no matter what tomorrow may bring.