
It's All About God, Stupid
Romans 13:1-7

Introduction:

[After reading the title, you better read the rest of this manuscript or I will be in trouble in your minds.]

**Its all about
the tax, stupid.**

Victory in the French and Indian War was costly for the British. At the war's conclusion in 1763, King George III and his government looked to taxing the American colonies as a way of recouping their war costs. They were also looking for ways to reestablish control over the colonial governments that had become increasingly independent while the Crown was distracted by the war. ~~Royal ineptitude compounded the problem.~~ A series of actions including the Stamp Act (1765), the Townsend Acts (1767) and the Boston Massacre (1770) agitated the colonists, straining relations with the mother country. But it was the Crown's attempt to tax tea that spurred the colonists to action and laid the groundwork for the American Revolution.

In Boston, the arrival of three tea ships ignited a furious reaction. The crisis came to a head on December 16, 1773 when as many as 7,000 agitated locals milled about the wharf where the ships were docked. A mass meeting at the Old South Meeting House that morning resolved that the tea ships should leave the harbor without payment of any duty. A committee was selected to take this message to the Customs House to force release of the ships out of the harbor. The Collector of Customs refused to allow the ships to leave without payment of the duty. Stalemate. The committee reported back to the mass meeting and a howl erupted from the meeting hall. It was now early evening and a group of about 200 men, some disguised as Indians, assembled on a near-by hill. Whopping war chants, the crowd marched two-by-two to the wharf, descended upon the three ships and dumped their offending cargos of tea into the harbor waters.

George Hewes was a member of the band of "Indians" that boarded the tea ships that evening. His recollection of the event was published some years later. We join his story as the group makes its way to the tea-laden ships:

"It was now evening, and I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet, which I and my associates denominated the tomahawk, with which, and a club, after having painted my face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a blacksmith, I repaired to Griffin's wharf, where the ships lay that contained the tea. When I first appeared in the street after being thus disguised, I fell in with many who

were dressed, equipped and painted as I was, and who fell in with me and marched in order to the place of our destination.

When we arrived at the wharf, there were three of our number who assumed an authority to direct our operations, to which we readily submitted. They divided us into three parties, for the purpose of boarding the three ships which contained the tea at the same time. The name of him who commanded the division to which I was assigned was Leonard Pitt. The names of the other commanders I never knew. We were immediately ordered by the respective commanders to board all the ships at the same time, which we promptly obeyed. The commander of the division to which I belonged, as soon as we were on board the ship, appointed me boatswain, and ordered me to go to the captain and demand of him the keys to the hatches and a dozen candles. I made the demand accordingly, and the captain promptly replied, and delivered the articles; but requested me at the same time to do no damage to the ship or rigging. We then were ordered by our commander to open the hatches and take out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard, and we immediately proceeded to execute his orders, first cutting and splitting the chests with our tomahawks, so as thoroughly to expose them to the effects of the water.

In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found in the ship, while those in the other ships were disposing of the tea in the same way, at the same time. We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.

...The next morning, after we had cleared the ships of the tea, it was discovered that very considerable quantities of it were floating upon the surface of the water; and to prevent the possibility of any of its being saved for use, a number of small boats were manned by sailors and citizens, who rowed them into those parts of the harbor wherever the tea was visible, and by beating it with oars and paddles so thoroughly drenched it as to render its entire destruction inevitable."¹

There is a catchy song that was being sung in those days. Let me teach it to you...I mean, read it to you:

Revolutionary Tea²

*There was an old lady lived over the sea,
And she was an Island Queen;
Her daughter lived off in a new country,
With an ocean of water between.*

¹ Hawkes, James A, *Retrospect of the Boston Tea-Party, with a Memoir of George R. T. Hewes...* (1834) reprinted in Commager, Henry Steele, Morris Richard B., *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* vol I (1958); Labaree, Benjamin Woods, *The Boston Tea Party* (1964).

² *The Annals of America* (vol.2), Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc (Helen Hemingway Benton, 1968), 245.

*The old lady's pockets were full of gold,
But never contented was she,
So she called on her daughter to pay her a tax
Of three pence a pound on her tea,
Of three pence a pound in her tea.*

*"Now mother, dear mother," the daughter replied,
"I shan't do the thing that you ax;
I'm willing to pay fair price for the tea,
But never the three penny tax."
"You shall," quoth the mother, and reddened with rage,
"For you're my own daughter, you see,
And sure 'tis quite proper the daughter should pay
Her mother a tax on her tea,
Her mother a tax on her tea."*

*And so the old lady her servant called up,
And packed off a budget of tea;
And eager for three pence a pound,
She put in enough for a large family.
She ordered her servants to bring home the tax,
Declaring her child should obey,
Or old as she was, and almost woman grown,
She'd half whip her life away,
She'd half whip her life away.*

*The tea was conveyed to the daughter's door,
All down by the ocean's side;
And the bouncing girl poured out every pound
In the dark and boiling tide.
And then she called out to the Island Queen,
"Oh, mother, dear mother," quoth she,
"Your tea you may have when 'tis steeped enough,
But never a tax from me,
But never a tax from me."*

Rhetorically: Whoa! Can't you feel the patriotic pride swelling up within you? Stick it to the Mother! Let's have us a Revolution!...It really was a rebellion! And one of the chief concerns that led to the American Revolution was taxation without representation. The headline of the online article I read from a moment ago was entitled, "It's About the Tax, Stupid!" And it really was about the tax.

Where was the church? What were the preachers saying? Where would you have been?

One colonial preacher delivered a sermon encouraging his hearers to resist The Stamp Act of 1765 (which led to the Tea Party). He appealed to Galatians 5:12,13, "Ye have been called to liberty." In the year of the Boston Tea Party, 1773, Benard Trumbull of North Haven, CT, preached from Exodus 1:8, "Now there arose up a new king over

Egypt, which knew not Joseph.” His point was to show that innovative actions by imperial governments can destroy the property, virtue and liberty of a self-sufficient people. The Sunday following the Tea Party, David Ramsey of Charleston, SC, supported the effort from his pulpit calling on his members to abstain from using the taxed tea all together. He appealed to Colossians 2:21, “Touch not; taste not; handle not.” Then in 1776 in the midst of the Revolutionary frenzy, one New England minister, Samuel Sherwood, of Weston CT, whipped up enthusiasm for the patriots by likening British oppression to the Beast of Revelation 13.³

Where would you have been?

Whatever you say about the American Revolution will affect how you respond to the T.E.A. Parties of last week (Taxed Enough Already).

Headline: Thousands Rally with ‘Tea Parties’ on Tax Day⁴

Dateline, Atlanta

Whipped up by conservative commentators and bloggers, tens of thousands of protesters staged "tea parties" around the country Wednesday to tap into the collective angst stirred up by a bad economy, government spending and bailouts. The rallies were directed at President Barack Obama's new administration on a symbolic day: the deadline to file income taxes. Protesters even threw what appeared to be a box of tea bags toward the White House, causing a brief lockdown at the compound.

Shouts rang out from Kentucky, which just passed tax increases on cigarettes and alcohol, to Salt Lake City, where many in the crowd booed Republican Gov. Jon Huntsman for accepting about \$1.5 billion in stimulus money. Even in Alaska, where there is no statewide income tax or sales tax, hundreds of people held signs and chanted "No more spending."

"Frankly, I'm mad as hell," said businessman Doug Burnett at a rally at the Iowa Capitol, where many of the about 1,000 people wore red shirts declaring "revolution is brewing." Burnett added: "This country has been on a spending spree for decades, a spending spree we can't afford."

In Boston, a few hundred protesters gathered on the Boston Common — a short distance from the original Tea Party — some dressed in Revolutionary garb and carrying signs that said "Barney Frank, Bernie Madoff: And the Difference Is?" and "D.C.: District of Communism."

Texas Gov. Rick Perry fired up a tea party at Austin City Hall with his stance against the federal government, as some in his U.S. flag-waving audience shouted, "Secede!"

³ These occasions are taken from Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 81-82.

⁴ Cited from Yahoo News, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090415/ap_on_re_us/tax_day_protests (accessed April 17, 2009 11:43a.m.).

Julie Reeves, of Covington, brought her Chihuahua Arnie, who wore a tiny anti-IRS T-shirt. "I want the government to get its hand the hell out of my wallet," Reeves said.

The movement attracted some Republicans considering 2012 presidential bids.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich planned to address a tea party in a New York City park Wednesday night. Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal sent an e-mail to his supporters, letting them know about tea parties throughout the state. South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford planned to attend two tea parties.

Other protesters also took direct aim at Obama. One sign in the crowd in Madison, Wis., compared him to the anti-Christ.

It doesn't take long before politics and economics turns theological, does it? When we start using words like "hell" and "anti-christ," we are justifying our real concerns, aren't we? "It's All About the Tax, Stupid." I think we need a radical biblical realignment: "It's all about God, Stupid." **What you think about taxes says something about what you think about God!**

Listen to Paul in Romans 13:1-7:

¹ 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Theme

Here is the theme of God's establishment of every government in the world today and every government that has ever been in history. Verse 1: "There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." And flowing from this theme is the theme of our relation to the government whether we live in Boston (1773), Madison, Milwaukee or Baghdad (2009).

I like what John Piper says about this text in one of his sermons:

This text has implications for war and peace, dictators and totalitarianism, concentration camps and gulags, revolts and revolutions, laws and law enforcement, political activism and civil disobedience, elections and lobbying,

voting and paying taxes, speed limits and seat belts, stop signs and baby seats. This is not a small text. It is one of those mountain peaks of the book of Romans that makes a reader dizzy with implications.⁵

This passage really puts us where we live on a daily basis: **between two kingdoms colliding**. We are citizens of two kingdoms. And it is precisely because Paul knew this that he wrote in this way here.

Why Romans 13:1-7?

- “Do not be conformed” – Avoid Emperor worship on the one hand and isolationism on the other hand
- “Do not repay” – Do not retaliate when persecuted and killed

Kingdoms Rise and Kingdoms Fall

1 Kings 12:15; Jer. 27:1-6; John 19:10; Daniel 2:21

Point: Christians are to submit to all governing authorities! Why?

1. Because to do so is submission to God – all authority comes from God
2. Because to do so is to enjoy the rule of law (v.2-3a).
 - The alternative to the rule of law is Somalia – a land of pirates and war lords
3. Because to do so is see God committed to your good (v.3b-4a).

Generally – Gov’t is a servant for good – They establish the rule of law – is for our good (positively)
4. Because to not do so is to be punished by God (v.4b)

Generally – Gov’t is a servant for punishment – They enforce the rule of law – To not submit is to incur punishment (negatively)

Christians submit because to not do so is to incur the wrath of God.
5. Because to do so is to enjoy a clean conscience (v.5).
 - Obey for the sake of conscience – don’t get used to silencing the voice of God.
 - Grappling with a building permit.
6. For the same reason! You pay taxes! (specifically!) (vv.6-7)

“Honor”

Don’t rush to what the text does not say – “But what if I lived under Idi Amin? Stalin? Hussein?” Grapple with what the text does say – how you doing with paying your taxes? Permits? Fees?

⁵ Cited from http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/211_Subjection_to_God_and_Subjection_to_the_State_Part_1/ (Accessed April 17, 2009 11:55 a.m.).

Conclusion:

Don't be so American that you can't be Christian.

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.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—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.

I am afraid the Constitution really has it upside-down. The starting point for all gov't is certain unalienable rights bestowed on humans. But these unalienable rights are really not biblical. If life is a right you would be unjust and unloving to ever lay it down as sacrifice. If life is an unalienable right, unable to be given away or taken away, then why didn't Jesus fight the injustice of his crucifixion? How was he able to lay his life down?

Life is not a right; it is a gift. It is a gift that is to be used as a steward – it belongs to God and is to be used as God would use it. That is how Paul can say, “offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (12:1). And if necessary, you can lay it down in sacrifice if it is for the good of others.

Furthermore, the Constitution is upside-down when it says that governments derive their power from the consent of the governed (these Right-bearing people). But Paul says that all governments derive their authority from God.

The Constitution embodies more of the humanistic philosophy of a Benjamin Franklin than it does the gospel of the Apostle Paul.

➤ The gospel is more concerned with your humility, submission and trust of Christ than it is with your social rights.

When we get upset about taxation or loss of civil rights, we run a huge risk of marginalizing the gospel and centralizing the peripheral. We begin to act in accordance to what we believe – that the issue really is the tax, the right to...

Closing Remarks...

1. Make sure your thinking grid begins first with the gospel at work in you. Do not begin with your rights but with your desire to be submissive and humble. See all your relationships with authority as opportunities to display and grow in humility, submission and trust.
2. Be slow to defend your rights. The thing you are seeking to defend just might not be a right but a stewardship gift that could be used more effectively by giving it away or laying it down.

3. Be careful how you engage in water cooler talk at work. Don't marginalize the gospel. Let it be central. What would that sound like? Think through the world's problems with gospel eyes not economic, social, cultural, political, or the like.
4. Be strategic in how you plan to tackle social ills. Develop clear plans of action that move from the gospel-center out to the needs of people. Draw from Jesus' ministry and notice how he moved from the center-out to the periphery.
5. Turn tax time into a worship experience (fees, fines, taxes) – God is for your good and even gov't can be a tool for your being gospelized. Work on your submission and your humility far more than you work on your self-protection and self-defense.
6. Do not silence God's voice in your conscience by justifying disobedience to governing authorities.