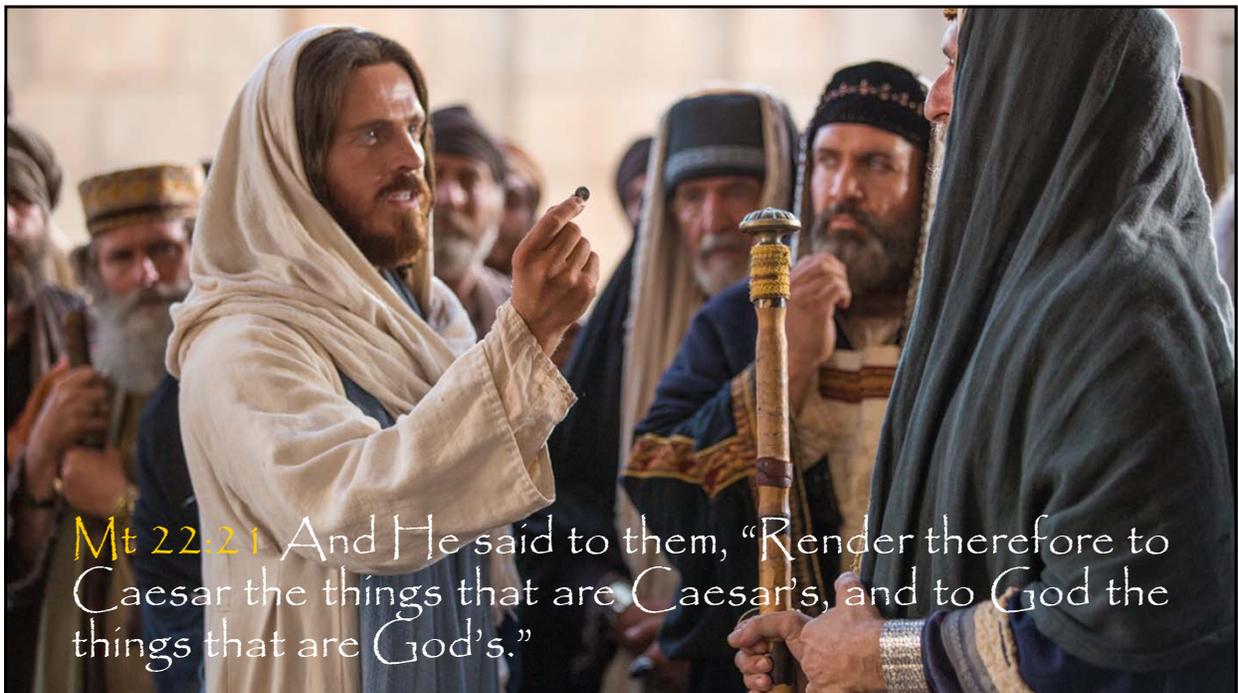
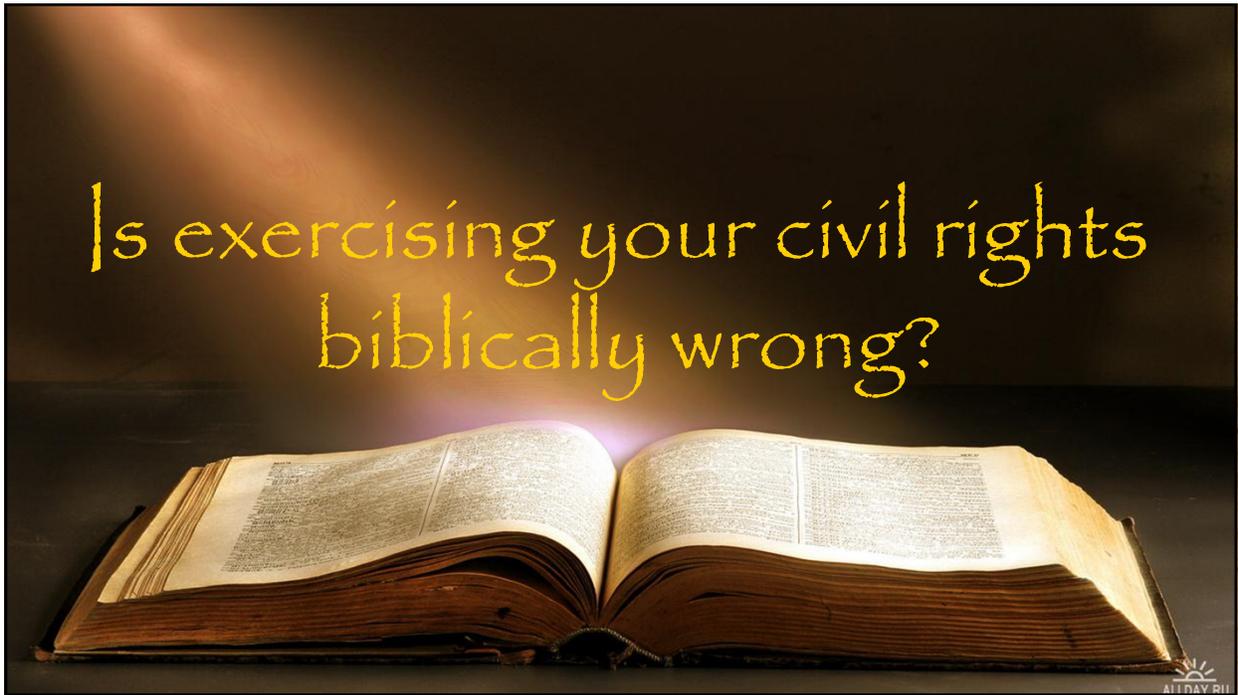


Is exercising your civil rights
biblically wrong?



Mt 22:21 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

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But aren't we citizens of heaven?

Phil 3:20 our citizenship is in heaven

Acts 16:35-40 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." ³⁷But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." ³⁸And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. ³⁹Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. ⁴⁰So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

On other occasions, Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen:

Acts 22:25-30 "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

Acts 25 He appeals his case to Caesar

- The jailer was elated that Paul and Silas were being released and that they were no longer in danger.
- But they had been beaten without a trial – which was against Roman law.
- Now they were being illegally forced to leave a Roman city – an act also against Roman law.

- Paul refused to be mistreated any longer.
- The magistrates were terrified when they learned that Paul was a Roman citizen.
- They came and pleaded with them to leave Philippi.
- Paul & Silas agreed to leave – but on their own terms and in their own time.

“There are times when we must endure persecution for the cause of Christ, but that does not mean we are to be everyone’s doormat or that we have to grovel before every bully who thinks he has found an easy mark. On two other occasions, Paul did not hesitate to invoke his civil rights at the first sign of high-handed injustice.” John Phillips



Mt 5:38-39 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Rom 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

Lk 22:36 “But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

When he could, Paul did not hesitate to exercise his rights under the law.

If Paul believed in government so much, why did he not engage in government and try to reform society through legal means?

- Paul lived under a dictatorship and in a time when the individual had little or no influence on their government.
- Paul's primary calling was to be an apostle and a pioneer of the gospel in Europe and Asia.
- His specific task was to spread the gospel by planting churches – not reform the Roman government.

But doesn't the Bible require unlimited submission to government?

Rom 13:1-6 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

John Allen, Second Baptist Church, Boston
December 3, 1772:

“That it is not rebellion, I declare it before God, the congregation, and all the world, and I would be glad if it reached the ears of every Briton, and every American; That it is no rebellion to oppose any king, ministry, or governor, that destroys by any violence or authority whatever, the rights of the people. Shall a man be deemed a rebel that supports his own rights? It is the first law of nature, and he must be a rebel to God, to the laws of nature, and his own conscience, who will not do it. A right to the blessing of freedom we do not receive from kings, but from heaven, as the breath of life, and essence of our existence; and shall we not preserve it, as the beauty of our being?”

Rev. Samuel West to Mass. Legislature,
May 29, 1776:

“Our duty of obedience to the magistrate is founded upon our obligation to promote the general good, our readiness to obey lawful authority will always arise in proportion to the love and regard that we have for the welfare of the public; and the same love and regard for the public will inspire us with as strong a zeal to oppose tyranny as we have to obey magistracy. Our obligation to promote the public good extends as much to the opposing every exertion of arbitrary power that is injurious to the state as it does to the submitting to good and wholesome laws.

No man, therefore, can be a good member of the community that is not as zealous to oppose tyranny, as he is ready to obey magistracy. A slavish submission to tyranny is a proof of a very sordid and base mind. Such a person cannot be under the influence of any generous human sentiments, nor have a tender regard for mankind. ... the same principles that oblige us to submit to civil government do also equally oblige us, where we have power and ability, to resist and oppose tyranny; and that where tyranny begins government ends. For, if magistrates have no authority but what they derive from the people; if they are properly of human creation; if the whole end and design of their institution is to promote the general good, and to secure to men their just rights, —

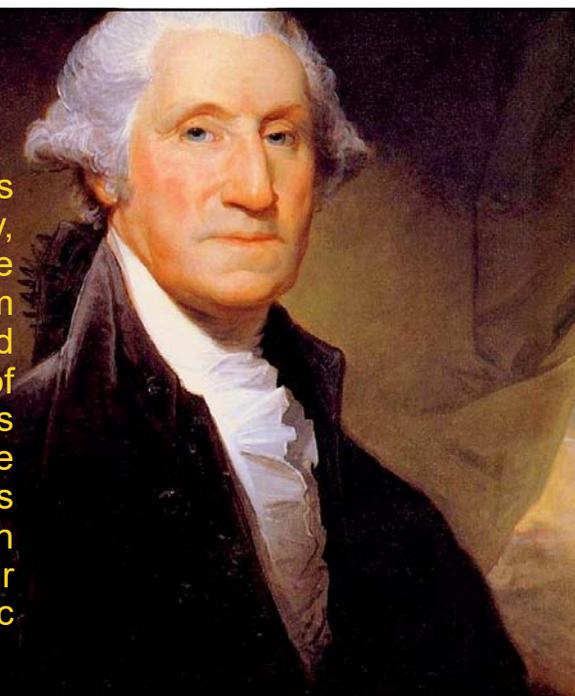
it will follow, that when they act contrary to the end and design of their creation they cease being magistrates, and the people which gave them their authority have the right to take it from them again. ... when a people find themselves cruelly oppressed by the parent state, they have an undoubted right to throw off the yoke, and to assert their liberty, if they find good reason to judge that they have sufficient power and strength to maintain their ground in defending their just rights against their oppressors; for, in this case, by the law of self-preservation, which is the first law of nature, they have not only an undoubted right, but it is their indispensable duty, if they cannot be redressed any other way, to renounce all submission to the government that has oppressed them, and set up an independent state of their own, even though they may be vastly inferior in numbers to the state that has oppressed them.

Should Christians engage in government or just stay out?

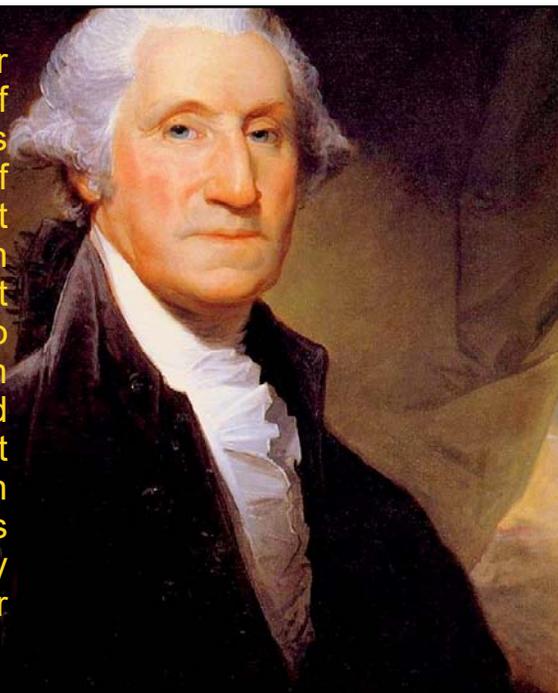
- Government exerts incredible influence in our lives.
- We are called to be “salt & light” – everywhere.
- Morality is crucial in a free society under a “constitutional republic.”

Washington farewell address 1796:

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked:



Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.



Letter to Pastor Zabdiel Adams
June 21, 1776

“Statesmen my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People in a greater Measure, than they have it now, they may change their Rulers and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty.”



Letter to the Officers of the First
Massachusetts Militia
October 11, 1798

“... we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”



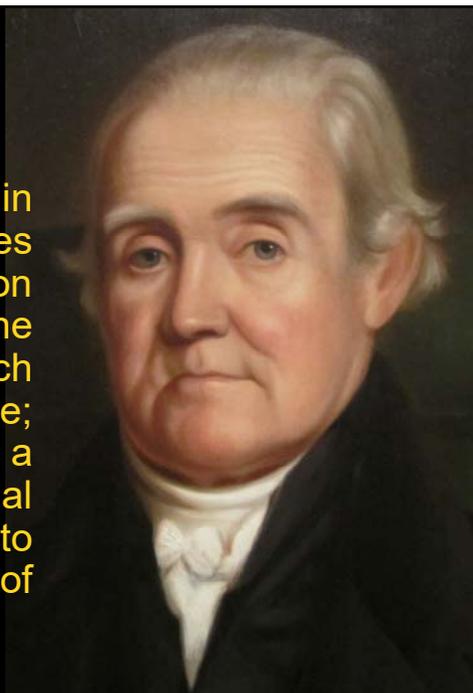
John Wingate Thornton
*The Pulpit of the American
Revolution*, 1860:

“The Fathers of the Republic did not divorce politics and religion, but they denounced the separation as ungodly.”



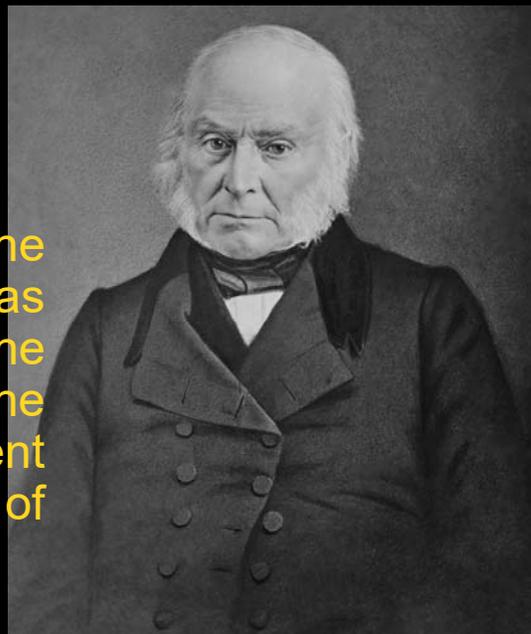
Noah Webster
History of the United States:

“Almost all the civil liberty now enjoyed in the world owes its origin to the principles of the Christian religion.... The religion which has introduced civil liberty is the religion of Christ and His apostles, which enjoins humility, piety, and benevolence; which acknowledges in every person a brother or sister and a citizen with equal rights. This is genuine Christianity, and to this we owe our free constitution of government.”



John Quincy Adams,
July 4th, 1821

“The highest glory of the American Revolution was this; it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.”



John Adams to Abigail
Adams, April 26, 1777:

“Posterity! You will never know,
how much it cost the present
Generation, to preserve your
Freedom! I hope you will make
a good Use of it. If you do not,
I shall repent in Heaven, that I
ever took half the Pains to
preserve it.”

