

JULY 25th and 26th
BEATING THE “BEAST” OF BRITAIN

“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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 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, 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. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 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.” **Romans 13:1-7**

“Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!” Take a guess about who thundered those words...without looking it up. Perhaps those words aren’t something stuck in your head from high school history class, but maybe these are... “As for me, give me liberty, or give me death.” If you guessed Patrick Henry, you are correct! All these words come from the same person, in the same speech. They were given to the Second Virginia Convention; its goal was to inspire Virginia to raise up local militia to engage the fight against Britain...but there were powerful forces at work already that had begun during the Great Awakening Revival. So here’s a question for you...was the revolution about politics or about religion? These matters can teach us some important ideas as we reflect on our nation’s religious history.

How did the verdict against the British move from resistance to revolution? The answer is found in how colonists viewed the British monarchy. You may struggle to believe this, but according to Thomas S. Kidd, an anonymous pamphlet dated 1777 claimed that “The Hebrew and Greek words for ‘Great Britain’ and ‘Royal Supremacy’ contained the hidden numbers 666, the number of the beast in Revelation 13.” Reverend Samuel Sherwood of Connecticut insisted that “God Almighty, with all the powers of heaven, are on our side. Great numbers of angels, no doubt, are encamping around our coast, for our defense and protection. Michael stands ready; with all the artillery of heaven, to encounter the dragon, and to vanquish this black host.” Before we become history snobs and call all this foolish, understand that this was the desperate rhetoric used to find more men to fight against Britain. As Kidd claims, “many ministers escalated the fight with Britain by interpreting it through apocalyptic lenses...many believed it could signal a critical epoch in the events leading to the return of Christ or the beginning of the millennium.” What made it so difficult to move people to fighting for a revolution? Romans 13 was a key passage that caused many colonists in rural areas to hesitate to join the fight. Their view was that Britain was placed there by God to govern them. Therefore, it was seen as unholy to bring war against what God had placed. The preaching of the Great Awakening changed this dynamic. Itinerant preachers that were outlawed since they were outside the established Anglican Church challenged the people to raise the power of the conscience over the law of the land.

These debates between resistance and revolution started over 250 years ago, so what does this teach us men? Frankly, we have been in similar places, even if we haven’t taken up arms to defend our religious freedom. Anyone remember the social distancing of COVID-19? Churches were forced in many places to close to the public for the health and well-being of everyone else. While rural central Pennsylvania was sheltered from most of the world-wide chaos, debate ensued. God or a country’s government? What does Romans 13 really mean in these contexts? It’s important for us to approach these issues humbly. Whichever way we lean on these important issues, we do set the tone in our families, churches, and communities. Will we continue to pray for wisdom as we seek to

follow our King Jesus as we live in the world that He has given us? There will be times in the future when the temperature rises. God has placed us in this world, "For such a time as this."

Spend some time thinking about the reason that God has placed government over us. Ask God for wisdom for how you can live faithfully before your God and be a faithful citizen of our country.

For Further Reading: Acts 5:17-42