

American Council of Christian Churches
75th Annual Convention, October 18-20, 2016
Faith Baptist Church, Kittery, Maine
“Resolution on Freedom and Respect for Civil Authority”

Two hundred and fifteen years ago this month, the Danbury [CT] Baptist Association authorized a letter to congratulate their newly elected president, Thomas Jefferson, and to welcome him to office. Baptists in Massachusetts were equally thankful for their new magistrate. Days after President Jefferson received the Danbury letter, Elder John Leland from Cheshire, MA delivered a 1200 pound Cheshire cheese to the White House with Jefferson’s favorite motto emblazoned on its side, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.”¹

The persecuted Baptists of New England expressed their convictions regarding the freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state in their letter: “Our Sentiments are uniformly on the side of Religious Liberty—That Religion is at all times and places a Matter between God and Individuals—That no man ought to suffer in Name, person or effects on account of his religious Opinions—That the legitimate Power of civil Government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor.”

When they spoke of “the legitimate Power of civil Government,” they did so recognizing the importance of the rule of law under the constitutional republic that God had ordained for their new nation: “Sir, we are sensible that the President of the united States, is not the national Legislator, & also sensible that the national government cannot destroy the Laws of each State; but our hopes are strong that the sentiments of our beloved President, which have had such genial Effect already, like the radiant beams of the Sun, will shine & prevail through all these States and all the world till Hierarchy and tyranny be destroyed from the Earth.”

¹ Clearly the apostle Paul, a Roman citizen who lived under the reign of Nero, would agree with Jefferson’s motto only when tyranny demands disobedience to God. Our founders’ doctrine of the consent of the governed, however, did come from a scriptural understanding of unalienable rights as gifts from God, not man or civil government. The revolution of the ten northern tribes of Israel was God’s judgment on the idolatry of Solomon’s leadership and the tyranny of Rehoboam’s oppression (1 Kings 11:29-39; 12:1-24).

Our freedom-loving founding fathers notwithstanding, tyranny has not been destroyed from the earth, and today it threatens the liberties of Americans in unprecedented ways. Facing these challenges, we look to the Word of God, which with its truth eternal stands like a rock undaunted amid the raging storms of time. There we find that civil authority is ordained of God (Rom. 13:1), and so we rest assured that God is sovereign over it. There we find that civil authority is a minister of God (v. 4), so we accept His just judgment of its administrations. There we find that civil authority is not a terror to the good, but to the evil (v. 3), so we determine to do that which is good, supporting law-enforcement officials in their dangerous work. There we find that civil authority executes wrath with a sword (vv. 4-5), so we determine to obey guided also by a free conscience, ever mindful of our Savior's admonition not to fear "those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather [to] fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches, at its annual convention, October 18-20, 2016, at Faith Baptist Church, Kittery, Maine, resolves to love freedom and to obey civil authority. We shall pray for "kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:2). We shall be faithful in our responsibilities as citizens of a government of the people, by the people, for the people, and ordained of the Lord. We shall endeavor to "let [our] conduct be as it becometh the gospel of Christ . . . stand[ing] fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. And in nothing terrified by [our] adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to [us] of salvation, and that of God" (Phil. 1:27-28).



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