

Additional Questions:

(1) Is it ever right to disobey government?

ESV Study Bible, p. 2551:

When Obedience to Government Is Wrong

Christians should *not* obey the government, however, when obedience would mean disobeying a command of God. This is indicated by a pattern showing approval of disobedience to government in several passages. For example, when commanded not to preach the gospel, Peter says, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Another example of this is found in Dan. 3:13–27, where Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship the golden statue, they stood firm against the king: "we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:18). God rescued them from the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:19–30). Other examples of obeying God through disobedience to civil governments include the Egyptian midwives (Ex. 1:17, 21), Esther (Est. 4:16); Daniel (Dan. 6:10); and the wise men (Matt. 2:8, 12).

(2) Is it ever proper to attempt to overthrow existing government, or to attain freedom from existing government? How can that be right in view of Romans 13:1-4?

a. One justification often used: lower official protecting citizens from higher official

see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), 4.20.31

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But we must ... be very careful not to despise or violate that authority of magistrates ... which God has established I am speaking all the while of private individuals.

For if there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings ... I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy
[nefarious: infamous by way of being extremely wicked]
[perfidy: deliberate breach of faith, calculated violation of trust, treachery],
because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.

(There were other similar Lutheran and Reformed statements.)

b. It is not wrong to try to change a government

(1) one example: voting

(2) God "appoints" or establishes leaders (Rom. 13:2)

→ but God works through human actions to "appoint" different leaders too

(3) Examples in Scripture of leaders delivering their people from tyrants:

Moses & Exodus (Exod. 1-14)

Judges (Judg. 2:16)

Hebrews 11:32-34

c. A difference between an individual criminal breaking a law (Rom. 13 prohibits), and a legitimate lower government official seeking independence from or change in higher government

(American colonies vs. King George III of England)

(Israelites - Egypt/ Pharaoh)

d. Also a difference between individual law-breaker and a group of law-abiding citizens seeking to rid themselves of tyranny

Rom. 13 was not written about this second group.

(plots against Hitler; book of Judges in Bible - God raised up deliverers)

e. Note reasoning in *Declaration of Independence*

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 ...

f. Long list of complaints in Declaration of Independence:

King George III had violated laws, dissolved legislatures, revoked charters, etc., and had become a "tyrant," - wrongfully depriving Americans of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"

g. Note that it was as representatives of the individual colonies that men signed the Declaration (lower government protecting its citizens from higher government)

h. Sum: I think the American Declaration of Independence, and the War of Independence, were justified, even necessary

i. Note first draft of Great Seal of United States (proposed by Benjamin Franklin, not adopted):

Picture of Moses looking back over the Red Sea while it closed over the armies of Pharaoh, with slogan:

"Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God"

Declaration of Independence

In Congress July 4, 1776, The Unanimous Declaration of The Thirteen United States of America

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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, having 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. Such has been the patient suffrance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizen taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connection and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Connecticut: Samuel Huntington, Roger Sherman, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott

Delaware: Thomas McKean, George Read, Caesar Rodney

Georgia: Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton

Maryland: Charles Carroll, Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone

Massachusetts: John Adams, Samuel Adams, Elbridge Gerry, John Hancock, Robert Treat Paine

New Hampshire: Josiah Bartlett, Matthew Thornton, William Whipple

New Jersey: Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon

New York: William Floyd, Francis Lewis, Philip Livingston, Lewis Morris

North Carolina: Joseph Hewes, William Hooper, John Penn

Pennsylvania: George Clymer, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, John Morton, George Ross, Benjamin

Rush, Jason Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson

Rhode Island: William Ellery, Stephen Hopkins

South Carolina: Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton, Edward Rutledge

Virginia: Carter Braxton, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Jefferson, Francis Lightfoot Lee, Richard Henry Lee,

Thomas Nelson, Jr., George Wythe