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Scriptural Justification for the American Revolution

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Abstract

This thesis will seek to examine the intention of the Founding Fathers regarding their decision to break from England in what became the American Revolution. On July 4th, 1776, fifty-five men gathered to sign the defining document of their cause – the Declaration of Independence. As the document presents the climactic argument against the English crown, this thesis will seek to analyze its writers' intentions, presuppositions, and rationalizations. Ultimately, this thesis will demonstrate that the Founders not only sought biblical justification for their actions and opinions, but followed the letter of biblical and common law in order to please both their Creator and their consciences.

Scriptural Justification for the American Revolution

In 1776, the Continental Congress gathered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and signed the Declaration of Independence. This document established the creed of the young colonies in their fight for freedom. The Declaration of Independence outlined the colonist's reason for seeking independence. By listing grievances perpetrated by their king, the colonists appealed to a higher law – one that existed beyond the king. The document asserted that an established series of rights exist for all men; that upon the usurpation of these rights, free men have not only the right, but the responsibility to act. Each of the signers of the Declaration had much to lose by supporting the piece. However, each had resolved that separation from England was necessary. Their rights as subjects had been transgressed; injustices reigned over the land. The vast majority of these men were religious. While several, including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were deists, all were severely impacted by the overtly religious philosophies that dominated the day. According to Dreisbach (2017), "Following an extensive survey of American political literature from 1760 to 1805, political scientist Donald S. Lutz reported that the Bible was referenced more frequently than any European writer or even any European school of thought" (p. 2). As such, the Founding Fathers certainly employed biblical justification for their decision to split from their governing authorities. The men that signed the Declaration of Independence were also influenced tremendously by the leading writers and philosophers throughout antiquity. According to Sheldon (2002), Men such as John Locke, John Calvin, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, and Samuel Rutherford impacted the colonists' justification of their separation. Throughout

the pre-war and war periods, the Founding Fathers acted consistently with historical and biblical teachings. According to (Beck, 2011), “The Founders’ faith in God meant that they believed our rights came directly from Him” (p. xxix). The Declaration of Independence outlined clearly their reasons for separation. Because King George III had violated his ordained authority by allowing his troops to murder civilians and ignoring petitions of redress, the Founding Fathers acted according to biblical principles in their decision to split from their governing authority

Role of the Government in Relation to Its People

Biblical View

The Bible speaks frequently concerning the role of government in relation to citizens and to God. In Romans 13, Paul wrote:

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... 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.

(English standard Version)

This passage, among others, supports the doctrine that government is instituted by God. Furthermore, the Bible is clear that because the Lord has appointed authorities, they are

to be obeyed. Included in the respect for authority is mentioned the payment of taxes. In the Declaration of Independence, the signers listed several instances in which the king had increased taxes without due representation. The colonies felt that the king had overstepped his bounds and was levying unlawful taxes. The English Parliament had passed a series of legislation between 1763 and 1773 that increased taxes on various products of everyday use. The colonists responded in December of 1773 by dumping a shipload of imported tea into the Boston Harbor (Kennedy, 2014). Nevertheless, the biblical mandate to pay the taxes that were due should have compelled the colonists to curb their frustrations. According to the *MacArthur Bible Commentary* (2005), “Because God ordained human government and demands submission to it... The Greek word referred specifically to taxes paid by individuals, particularly those living in a conquered nation to their foreign rulers – which makes the tax even more onerous” (p. 1548). Thus, the recipients of the letter of Romans were being commanded to face taxes equally as oppressive as the colonists.

In 1 Peter 2, Peter commanded the reader to:

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (ESV)

Thus, not only are Christians supposed to be subject to their rulers, but they are to do so with the hope that the leaders will see the work of Christ in their lives. John MacArthur wrote that members of the body of Christ are “to live in obedience to every institution of

civil and social order on earth...Only when the government tries to force a Christian to do what is against the law of God explicitly stated in Scripture should he refuse to submit” (p. 1910). Titus 3:1 states, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work” (ESV). Clearly, the Bible places quite a responsibility on believers for adhering to the governing laws of the land. More so than a civil responsibility, obedience to and respect for authorities is a moral obligation.

While citizens must respect their authorities, the government to whom God has allotted power must understand its responsibility. Governments should never interfere with the obligation of an individual to follow God’s law. In cases where following the law of governments should cause an individual to enter into sin, the government should not be obeyed. In Mark 12, Jesus was being questioned by the Pharisees. In an attempt to trap him, the Pharisees asked if citizens should have to pay taxes to their Roman rulers. Christ, knowing their intentions, answered in verse 17, “...‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’...” (ESV). In this passage, Jesus deftly responds to the Pharisees by stressing that the government certainly has a role and an influence in the lives of individuals. However, God, the Creator and source of government power deserves a place in their lives as well. Later in his life, Christ rebuts Pilate by saying, “...‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above...’” (John 19:11). Authority in government is given by God. Because of this, governments are to be held responsible for their actions before the law of God.

In Acts 4:19 and 5:29, situations arise in which the apostles of God are asked to disobey the commands of the Lord. Peter, speaking in Acts 5 states, ““We must obey God rather than men”” (ESV). Peter rightly refused to abide by the instructions of the government, as it was forcing him to disobey the Lord’s instructions. John MacArthur (2005) commented on this by saying, “Christians should obey governmental authority, but when government decrees are clearly contrary to God’s Word, God must be obeyed” (p. 1443). Clearly, the Bible emphasizes the importance of government authority. However, the legitimate authority of the government is always limited to enforcing the laws that God has given. Anything contrary to these laws must be confronted by the civilians under the government’s authority.

Historical View

The men who signed the Declaration of Independence were certainly some of the most educated men of their time. As such, they based their views of government off many of the leading philosophers, scholars, and theologians throughout antiquity. One of the largest complaints against the king from the colonists was the colloquial phrase “Taxation without representation.” The colonists believed that King George III enacted regulations, taxes, and laws based not on the input of the people, but because his own political agenda depended upon it. Machiavelli wrote in his 15th century piece, *The Prince*:

For as those who make maps of countries place themselves low down in the plains to study the character of mountains and elevated lands, and place themselves high up on the mountains to get a better view of the plains, so in like manner to

understand the People a man should be a Prince, and to have a clear notion of Princes he should belong to the People. (p. viii)

Machiavelli adequately described the colonists' frustrations with their king. King George III did not seek to consider the needs of his citizens. Because of this, the colonists wrote in the Declaration, "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" (Declaration Full Text).

One philosopher that heavily influenced the Founders was 17th century philosopher John Locke. Locke's writings laid the foundation for many of the publications of the Founders including the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution (ratified in 1789) (Kennedy, et al). Locke believed in the idea of "natural rights" – that every man had certain rights that could not be infringed upon by the government. In regard to natural rights, Locke (1690) wrote:

And it is not without reason that he [a man] seeks out and is willing to join in society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name – property. The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting. (p. 82)

Locke described three basic rights that are guaranteed to every individual: life, liberty, and property. These three foundational rights are echoed in the Declaration of Independence itself: "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” (Declaration, et al). Locke argued that no matter the circumstance, these rights should be upheld by the governing body. The signers went on to argue that because their rights were not being upheld, they had a right to “institute a new government” (Declaration, et al).

Locke further argued that when citizens wish to subject themselves a governing body, three factors must be pre-established and remain constant through the lifetime of the civil agreement. First, there must be “an established, settled, known law” (Locke, 1690, p. 82). For a government to not infringe on the rights of its people, there must be a pre-determined law to which both will adhere. Secondly, Locke (1690) stated that there must be “a known and indifferent judge” (p. 83). The rule of law must not be allowed to change based on the whim of one man. Rather, the law must be understood and upheld by a constant force. Finally, Locke (1690) called for “due execution” (p. 83). The executor of the law must not grow weary in his responsibility. He is responsible to both the government and his people – to ensure that the rights of each are not infringed by the other.

In regard to legislative authority, Locke held that four principles must guide policy making. In order to honor its constituents, a legislative body must:

Govern by promulgated established laws, not to be varied in particular cases, but to have one rule for rich and poor... laws also ought to be designed for no other end ultimately but the good of the people... They must not raise taxes on the property of the people without the consent of the people given by themselves or

their deputies... Legislative neither must nor can transfer the power of making laws to anybody else... (Locke, 1690, p. 95)

The founding fathers certainly were influenced by these instructions. First, as the Declaration declares, King George III had violated the colonists' right to legal trial. His own military was protected from punishments for committing crimes including murder (Declaration, et al). As previously mentioned, one of the largest complaints of the colonists was that they were being taxed without due representation. Furthermore, according to their grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence, King George III had appointed local leaders in place of the colonists' duly elected officials. The Declaration reads, "...For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever" (Declaration, et al). Thus, according to Locke's writings, the Founding Fathers were certainly justified in their decision to split from England. According to the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence, King George III had violated almost every principle that Locke had described. Because Locke had such a profound influence on many of the philosophies of the Founders (as seen from the language of the Declaration), his theories provided a clear justification for the American Revolution.

In their decision to separate from Britain, the Founders also leaned on the teachings of John Calvin. Calvin was a proponent of the biblical principle that authority was given by God (Samson, 2016). Nevertheless, he also maintained that civil disobedience was permitted in the case that the government was enforcing laws that were not biblical. In reference to the men of King Jeroboam of Israel, Calvin (1536) stated:

The prophet severely condemns them for having ‘willingly walked after the commandment’ [Hos. 5:11]; so far is any praise from being due to the pretext of humility with which courtly flatterers excuse themselves and deceive the unwary, when they deny that it is lawful for them to refuse compliance with any command of their kings, as if God had resigned his right to mortal men when he made them rulers of mankind, or as if earthly power were diminished by being subordinated to its author before whom even the principalities of heaven tremble with awe.

Certainly, Calvin believed that the laws of God were higher than the laws of men. Thus, kings had no right to suppose that their decrees would hold more weight than that of Creator God. Another religious leader that wrote on the subject of civil government was Thomas Aquinas. In his piece, “Of Princely Government,” Aquinas stated, “...it is the king’s duty to seek the good of the multitude...” Despite being a leader of the church, Aquinas still recognized the government’s role in the community. The government is simply to provide for the good of those it has been tasked with protecting.

The signers of the Constitution were certainly some of the most learned men of their time. The writings of the philosophers, religious leaders, and scholars mentioned above impacted the reasoning and rationalization of the Founders. The decision to separate from England was certainly not a whimsical one. On the contrary, the Founders deliberated long and hard before reaching their conclusion. The Declaration of Independence centered around the idea of self-evident truths, unalienable rights, and a just government. The Declaration read:

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn 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. (Declaration, et al)

The signers of the Declaration recognized that war with England meant destruction, loss, and havoc – all occurring on American soil and seas. Revolution would mean fighting against their friends and family who yet remained in England. Nevertheless, they considered the encroachments of the English Crown to be too much to bear. The Founders believed that when government has transgressed past a certain degree, its citizens were justified in changing their government. Based on their beliefs that were influenced by the Bible and philosophers and writers throughout antiquity, the Founders believed they were justified.

The Bible lays the foundation for the proper relationship between God, government, and individuals. Locke, Calvin, and many more argued that governments are accountable to their citizens and to God. Locke proposed that if at any time the government ceases to function according to the predetermined governing laws, its citizens have the right to call for redress (Sheldon, 2002). However, despite restrictive laws and excessive taxes, the Bible maintains that citizens should maintain respect for

their authorities unless the authorities are requiring that the law of God be broken. The unalienable rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of property served as a benchmark for the Founders to gauge the abuses of their government. As described by the Declaration, King George III had acted in such a way that all three rights were being abused.

When the Role of Government is Abused

Civil Disobedience

As previously mentioned, there is a manner in which a government is supposed to respond to its people. However, there is a time when civil disobedience is biblically justified. Clearly, the Founders believed that if a government transgresses its God-given responsibility, its citizens have a right to change the governing authority. The Founders believed they were justified in their decision and that history and the Bible supported their cause. As previously discussed, the Bible commands obedience to the government. During the time of Paul's letter to the Romans (in which he commands obedience to governing authorities), the Emperor Nero was inflicting severe persecution upon the Christians. In order to analyze the biblical foundation for civil disobedience, several scriptural and historical examples must be analyzed.

First, before evaluating the scriptural base for civil disobedience, a proper understanding of the term and its implications are necessary. In his book *God and Government*, former White House aide Charles Colson (2007) describes the basic principles surrounding the idea of civil disobedience. Colson described three situations in which civil disobedience is allowed. First, according to Colson (2007), "Civil disobedience is clearly justified when government attempts to take over the role of the

church or allegiance due only to God. Then the Christian has not just the right but the duty to resist” (p. 281). To demonstrate this point, Colson cited the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter three in the book of Daniel (ESV). These three Hebrews were told to worship King Nebuchadnezzar instead of their God. Rather than bow down to the statue, the three young men elected to be thrown into a fiery furnace. Miraculously, the Lord delivered them. Colson (2007) wrote, “To worship an earthly king would be the ultimate offense against their holy God” (p. 281). Colson asserted that unless a government is directly replacing God as the author of law, it should be obeyed. He quoted Augustine, writing, “An unjust law is no law at all” (p. 280). While the English king had not commanded direct worship from his subjects, he had allowed injustices to be inflicted on those in his care.

The second reason Colson (2007) allowed for civil disobedience is when “the state restricts freedom of conscience, as in the case of Peter and John...” (p. 281). In Acts 4, Peter and John refused to cease preaching the message of Christ. To be sure, a Christian’s first commitment is to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, Colson (2007) writes:

The third justification for civil disobedience is probably the most difficult to call. It is applied when the state flagrantly ignores its divinely mandated responsibilities to preserve life and maintain order and justice. Those last words are key for Christians in deciding to disobey civil authority. Civil disobedience is never undertaken lightly or merely to create disorder. (p. 282)

It was for this reason that the Founders believed they were justified. Their king had transgressed the natural laws appointed to rulers – to uphold the rights to life and liberty and to ensure justice.

Even in situations in which civil disobedience is necessary, anarchy against the government must not prevail. On the contrary, civilians are not to simply disobey every law that an abusive government enforces. Colson (2007) wrote, “When all recourse to civic obedience has been exhausted and the evil of the state is so entrenched as to be impenetrable, then the Christian may be justified...in organizing to overthrow the state” (p. 283). It is important to repeat that the Founders were hesitant to separate from England. Per the Declaration, the colonies had repeatedly appealed to their fellow Englishmen to assist them in their plight. The Founders truly believed that complete separation from England was necessary. Colson (2007) continued:

Many ministers in the colonies agreed as well; when they preached that the people had the authority to resist the king when the king violated God’s commands, they were setting the stage for the American Revolution. After dumping tea in Boston Harbor the next step of resistance was the musket. A Boston preacher said that for a people to ‘arise unanimously and resist their prince, even to dethrone him, is not criminal but a reasonable way of vindicating their liberties and just rights.’ (pp. 376-377)

Clearly, the colonies utilized biblical wisdom to justify defending their rights against Britain. To be sure, these ministers did not advocate for immediate, violent restitution for grievances. Rather, each advocated for peaceful attempts at reconciliation. Reverend

Samuel Rutherford, one of the bastions of the argument for civil disobedience, wrote extensively on the topic in the mid 1600s. In his piece, *Lex Rex*, on the subject of resistance against the king, Rutherford (1644) wrote:

The consequence (of resistance against the king) is naught, for a private man may defend himself against unjust violence, but not any way he pleaseth: the first way is by supplications and apologies, - he may not presently use violence to the king's servants before he supplicate, nor may he use re-offending, if flight may save.

In July of 1775, the Continental Congress drafted and approved the Olive Branch Petition – a letter that was sent to King George III outlining the colonies grievances against the crown (Kennedy, et al). The Petition reads:

We beg leave further to assure your Majesty, that notwithstanding the sufferings of your loyal colonists, during the course of the present controversy, our breasts retain too tender a regard for the kingdom from which we derive our origin, to request such a reconciliation as might in any manner be inconsistent with her dignity or her welfare. These, related as we are to her, honor and duty, as well as inclination, induce us to support and advance; and the apprehensions that now oppress our hearts with unspeakable grief, being once removed your Majesty will find your faithful subjects on this continent ready and willing at all times, as they ever have been, with their lives and fortunes, to assert and maintain the rights and interests of your Majesty, and of our Mother country.

The colonists considered themselves to be English citizens, despite the fact that for three months the American militia had been in direct conflict with the British regular army.

The document concludes with the Congress wishing King George III a “long and prosperous reign” (Olive Branch Petition, et al). The Founders had every hope that their requests would be honored and that redress would be given. Nevertheless, King George III rejected the document. Almost precisely one year later, the same Congress drafted the Declaration of Independence, claiming the king they once revered a tyrant unworthy of leadership and power.

Historical philosophies. Prior to analyzing Scriptural examples of civil disobedience, one must understand relevant philosophies that characterized the beliefs of the Founders. While very religious, the Founders interpreted Scripture through the lens of the leading philosophies that were involved in their education. First, the Founders maintained the belief that the law was dominant. Kings and rulers were tasked with enforcing the law, but the law itself was of the highest value. This principle was originally established under the Magna Carta that was signed in 1215. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “By declaring the sovereign to be subject to the rule of law and documenting the liberties held by ‘free men,’ the Magna Carta would provide the foundation for individual rights in Anglo-American jurisprudence” (Magna Carta, 2017). This view can clearly be seen in the actions and writings of the Founders. Because they believed in the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that everyman was given, the Founders felt that their king had overstepped the bounds of his rule.

The Founders also believed in the doctrine of Interposition. According to Bona and Schanzenbach (2016), this idea claimed that “Magistrates at any level may step between officers of the government and the people to stop the government’s immoral or unlawful actions” (p. 79). By revolting against the king, the Founders themselves were interposing on behalf of the colonies. As delegates, their responsibility was to petition the king on behalf of their constituents. A large proponent of the philosophy of Interposition was Scottish reformer John Knox (Bona et al, 2016). Knox, preaching against the corruption of church authorities, appealed to a higher law. Based on the Scriptures in Matthew 10 (that Christ would deny those who denied His authority), Knox (1558) asserted that “if a magistrate tries to impose any edict not given by God in His Word, then that magistrate is in fact denying Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, and Christ in turn has rejected him.” Thus, a lower magistrate has not only the right, but the responsibility to confront and correct the higher magistrate. Similar to John Calvin, Knox asserted that the highest governing law was the law of God. According to Bona et al (2016), “Knox’s concern in both of these points is that magistrates must obey the principles of God’s law. If they violate God’s law in their actions or pronouncements, then they are lawless and should not be given honor or obedience” (p. 84). Essentially, Knox believed that a law given outside of the direction of God was an unjust law. As such, the law should not be obeyed.

Biblical examples. Through the lenses of these philosophies, the Founders viewed the Scriptures. While the Bible commands obedience and respect to governing authorities, there are several instances in the Scripture where civil disobedience and

revolt were honored, and even commanded. The first of these is found in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 6, Daniel himself describes an event in which he was held innocent by the Lord for disobeying his king. King Darius had signed a decree proposed by his wise men and satraps, ordering that any man who prayed to a man or god beside the king should be arrested and cast into a den of lions. Daniel was in the ritual of praying before God three times a day before an open window. Knowing that Daniel was devout, the satraps and governors caught Daniel during his daily prayer, and ushered him before the king. Daniel had unequivocally disobeyed the king's orders – earning a death sentence. Because the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be reversed (Daniel 6:12; incidentally this is a further demonstration of the historical belief that the law is higher than a king), Daniel was indeed thrown into the lions' den. Miraculously, the Lord closed the mouths of the lions, leaving Daniel unharmed. When the king approached the lions' den to inquire after Daniel, Daniel said, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm” (ESV). In this verse, Daniel asserted that God himself has found Daniel blameless, despite his direct obedience to the appointed authority. Because King Darius had instituted a law that directly conflicted with the laws of Scripture, Daniel was innocent in the eyes of God despite his disobedience. As previously asserted, should any government initiate a law that commands the disobedience of God's law, the law should not be obeyed. John Calvin (1536) wrote:

On this principle Daniel denied that he had committed any crime against the king in disobeying his impious decree; because the king had exceeded the limits of his office, and had not only done an injury to men, but, by raising his arm against God, had degraded his own authority.

Calvin believed that not only was Daniel innocent, but King Darius had overstepped the bounds of rule that had been granted to him from his Creator. This example testifies to the belief that government may be disobeyed when it directly contradicts the Scriptures.

A second biblical example of civil disobedience can be found in 2 Kings 11 (ESV). In this story, Athaliah (the Queen Mother of Judah) having found her son (King Ahaziah) dead, slaughtered the remnant of the royal family. However, one of the sons of King Ahaziah – Joash – was rescued by a family member and whisked away to safety. Athaliah succeeded in gaining rule over the kingdom of Judah. However, six years later, the supporters of young Joash – the rightful heir – staged a coup, established Joash as king, and executed the murderous Queen Athaliah. During her rule, the queen had allowed murder, injustice, and idol-worship to reign throughout the land. She had abused the power that the Lord had bestowed on her. Because of these injustices, she was overthrown. In this example, the leadership of the kingdom was not just disobeyed, but was overthrown. The queen had violated the law of the Lord. She had allowed his commandments to be transgressed, and had even perpetrated the murder of her own family.

Scripture provides several other examples of men and women who were directed or blessed by the Lord through their overthrow or disobedience to the governing

authorities. In the book of Judges, Ehud, Gideon, and Samson were all given commands to wreak havoc on their authorities. In Judges 3, Ehud even assassinated the king of Moab while claiming to have a message for him from the Lord (ESV). These passages simply demonstrate that the command to honor governing authorities does not trump the command to honor God. The Founders recognized the authority of their government as given by God. However, they reasoned that because it was given by God, the government was accountable to the laws of God. Through an analysis of these biblical examples, one can rightly conclude that civil disobedience is certainly not forbidden by God. On the contrary, throughout Scripture, His followers have been commended for resisting leaders that have usurped their allotted authority.

Just War

The step beyond civil disobedience for the Founders was war with England. The colonies had petitioned their king on several occasions to relent and to honor their rights. Nevertheless, following the Declaration of Independence, full scale war erupted. Despite the fact that several skirmishes and battles had taken place prior to the signing of the Declaration, the signing itself united the colonies into a full-scale war effort (Kennedy, 2014). Soon after the signing, British General Howe and 32,000 troops occupied the city of New York (Kennedy, 2014). Over the course of the next seven years, war ravaged the length and breadth of the young nation.

From the biblical examples of civil disobedience cited above, several of which involved violent political upheaval, it follows that war itself must be evaluated in a similar regard. Certainly, as Colson (2007) asserted, wars and rebellions are not fought

trivially. St. Augustine himself, writing in the fifth century, claimed, "...it [the earthly city] makes war in order to attain this peace..." Thus, a specific set of circumstances allow for war in the same manner as civil disobedience. Of course, it is the duty of the Christian to opt for the option that entails the least resistance. Colson (2007) cited a story in the book of Daniel, in which Daniel refused the food of the king (Daniel 1, ESV). However, even in his resistance, Daniel maintained a posture of humility and peace (Colson, 2007). Having repeatedly petitioned the king for redress, the colonists believed war was the only remaining option. In this way, the Founders followed the precedents in Scripture: they vied for peace and turned to war only out of necessity.

In order to holistically evaluate the actions of the Founders in the American Revolution, one must analyze their methods during warfare. An effective way to measure their actions is by applying the principles of Just War theory. Just War theory is a generally accepted set of standards by which nations are justified in taking up arms. According to Dorbolo (2001), "The United States does explicitly recognize Just War theory as criteria for engaging in war. Thus, the criteria of Just War theory are a primary basis for discussion and debate about US war actions." While the United States does not currently recognize Just War theory as binding for war-time guidelines, the theory is a widely respected and honored system of beliefs. Just War theory describes the basic guidelines for entering into and operating within a conflict. Originally posited by Augustine and Aquinas, the principles of Just War theory have expanded over the past few centuries as ethicists have tweaked standards for acceptable warfare (Dorbolo, 2001). Just War theory is divided into two categories, *jus ad bellum* ("the right to go to war")

and *jus in bello* (“the right conduct in war”) (Dorbolo, 2001). Each category has requirements which must be met for the conflict to be considered “just.” Within the category of *jus ad bellum*, are the elements of just authority, just cause, just intention, last resort, and reasonable probability of success (Goldman, 2006). The category *jus in bello* further adds the requirements of proportionality, discrimination, and responsibility (Dorbolo, 2001). Thus, the Founders’ actions surrounding the American Revolution can be analyzed through these criteria to determine their ethicality.

Here it must be noted that the term *ethical* and *biblical* are not intended to be equivalents. The biblical argument that allows for civil disobedience can be extrapolated to the argument for war; both resist king and rulers. Certainly, war results in more destruction than civil disobedience. Nonetheless, war is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. Indeed, stories of the heroes of wars fill the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, on several occasions the servants of the Lord were *commanded* to overthrow their immoral, idolatrous king. Christ himself had an interaction with a Roman centurion in Matthew 8 (ESV). In this situation, Christ does not condemn the man’s occupation. Rather, he marvels at his faith. Thus, war, like civil disobedience, must not be a triviality, but is not expressly forbidden in the Scripture. Lazar (2016) wrote:

War can be necessary and proportionate only if it serves an end worth all this death and destruction. Hence the importance of having a just cause [SIC]. And hence too the widespread belief that just causes are few and far between. Indeed, traditional Just War theory recognizes only two kinds of justification for war: national defense (of one’s own state or of an ally) and humanitarian intervention.

What's more, humanitarian intervention is permissible only to avert the very gravest of tragedies.

Given this explanation, the American Revolution can be evaluated in terms of *ethicality* by applying the principles of Just War theory.

Jus ad bellum. The first category of Just War theory is *jus ad bellum*, and describes the decision to go to war. As previously mentioned, this category involves just cause, just authority, just intention, last resort, and a reasonable probability of success. First, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Founders believed that they certainly had a just cause. They believed that their king had abused his power. He had transgressed the laws of man and God. Because of this, they were justified in their decision to go to war. The second qualification is just authority. By the time the Declaration of Independence had been signed, skirmishes had already been rippling along the colonies. Nevertheless, the Declaration establishes the authority of the United States as a nation with which to go to war with Britain. The language in the Declaration reads:

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America [sic], in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions... 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... all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. (Declaration, et al)

Congress declared that not only were the colonies independent of the authority of the British crown but were uniting as their own union. This union of States would have the powers to “levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do” (Declaration, et al). These powers indicated that the United States was its own entity capable of participating in all defining acts of a nation. Because of this, the United States met the qualification for just authority.

Third, according to the Just War theory, the United States required just intentions in going to war with Britain. According to Dorbolo (2001), this means that a limit is set as to the extent of the war. Because English troops were within the colonies, the primary military goal of the war was simply to expel the British. Indeed, soon after Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, the British began evacuating Charleston, Savannah, and New York (Kennedy, 2014). The Founders had reached the limit of their intentions in the conflict. They did not desire to pursue British troops back to England. In fact, when several British garrisons remained and England again began infringing upon the rights of the United States, the two countries became engaged in the War of 1812. However, the Treaty of Paris effectively ended the war and granted the colonies their wish. In this way, the Founders satisfied the requirement of Just Intentions. Furthermore, the colonies attempted repeatedly to petition King George III prior to the start of war, satisfying the requirement of last resort. The colonies thoroughly documented their grievances and their attempts at redress in the Declaration of Independence.

The final requirement is probability of success. This is the only quality in which the Founders may not have met the qualification. Until the Declaration was signed, the colonies had been completely dependent upon Britain for their defense; a Continental Army was not commissioned until 1775 (Kennedy, et al). The colonies had had no previous navy with which to protect its trade, and British soldiers were living in the homes of thousands of citizens. The colonies had had extremely limited experience convening as a group, and did not even have the full support of their constituents. Thus, in this regard, the Founders did not align with the final requirement of Just War theory.

Jus in bello. In order to satisfy the requirements of Just War theory, the Founders would also have to have met the qualifications for *jus in bello* or the “right conduct in war” (Dorbolo, 2001). These qualifications are as follows: proportionality, discrimination, and responsibility. Proportionality refers to the styles of warfare itself. The qualification requires that tactics are met with equal measure. Due to the style of fighting in the day and the similarity of weaponry between the British and the Americans, this qualification can be answered satisfactorily. Both sides also had extensive intelligence networks. Under Major André, the British gathered invaluable intelligence as to the inner workings of Washington’s staff, and even succeeded in turning a successful American general – Benedict Arnold – into a traitor. General Washington maintained an extensive spy network through his Culper Spy Ring (Daigler, 2014). Major Benjamin Tallmadge ran this ring in and around Long Island and New York City during the time of the British occupation, and managed to not lose a single agent over the course of the war (Culper Spy Ring, 2017). Both the British and the American spy networks provided

sensitive information and greatly impacted the course of the war. In this way, the colonies were proportional in their method of war.

The next qualification of *jus in bello* is discrimination. Discrimination refers to the distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants. Because the war was fought on American soil, there were not many British non-combatants that could have been targeted. However, there was a substantial Loyalist population in the colonies during the war. While many Loyalists formed ranks and fought alongside the British, the Loyalists often experience fierce persecution from their patriot neighbors (Fredriksen, 2006). According to Fredriksen (2006), "They [loyalists] were openly regarded as traitors and state legislatures frequently stripped them of political rights and confiscated their properties." Certainly, the states were justified in revoking the rights of those citizens that fought alongside the British. However, the Loyalists that did not fight also endured severe mistreatment. The Loyalists were abused beyond what was proportional in the war. According to Fredriksen (2006), Loyalists were sometimes tarred and feathered and even murdered in attempts to intimidate. Shortly after the war, hundreds of thousands of Loyalists emigrated from the states to Canada, Florida (owned by Spain), and back to England (Fredriksen, 2006). Because of their poor treatment of the Loyalists, the colonies did not adequately meet the requirements of discrimination.

The final aspect of *jus in bello* is responsibility. Dorbolo (2001) stated:

A country is not responsible for unexpected side effects of its military activity as long as the following three conditions are met: The action must carry the intention

to produce good consequences... The bad effects were not intended... The good of the war must outweigh the damage done by it.

This qualification can be fairly ambiguous, as it best relates to specific actions and not the course of the war itself. The American Revolution was unique in the sense that the colonists were expelling a military force from their land. Thus, the consequences of war would have been wrought on their own citizens and supporters. The final aspect of responsibility is quite relevant. Certainly, the Founders achieved what they had embarked to do. The result of the war was a free union of states. However, this end was certainly not foreseeable during the conflict. Thus, in terms of the final aspect of *jus in bello*, the Founders were justified because the end of the war brought good to the colonies. In total, the Founders adequately answered every aspect of Just War save two – reasonable probability of success and discrimination.

Final Analysis and Evaluation

The Declaration of Independence itself is the key to analyzing the biblical foundation of the Founders' decision to revolt against England. The list of grievances against King George III cited many reasons for severing ties with the crown. This list included taxation without representation, quartering of troops, dissolution of governing bodies, manipulation of legislatures and judges, and deprivation of commonly held English rights. In the opinions of many influential philosophers cited above (i.e., Locke), these reasons alone would have been justification enough for entering into war. The king had certainly overstepped the bounds granted by the people. Nonetheless, for a biblical evaluation, none of these reasons give cause for civil disobedience, let alone war.

However, as documented in the Declaration of Independence, there are a series of accusations that would allow for a just rebellion.

The most incriminating accusation against King George III in the Declaration is the following: “For protecting them, by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States...” (Declaration, et al). In this phrase, the Founders accuse the king of not only breaking the natural rule of law a king is designated to uphold but of breaking the law of God. By allowing his armies to perpetrate such atrocities on his citizens, the King was ruling by injustice. As such, according to the doctrine of Interposition, the Continental Congress interposed for their constituents and called out the king for his offenses. Their civil disobedience was justified, for their king was permitting injustice and murder to remain unpunished. In attempt to reconcile, the Olive Branch Petition was sent. Upon King George’s rejection of this attempt, the colonists were justified according to Just War theory in their decision to go to war. This accusation against the crown can be compared to the story of King Joash cited above (2 Kings 11). The evil Queen Athaliah was overthrown because injustice and murder characterized her reign. In a similar sense, King George III was allowing his citizens to be murdered by his military without consequence. In this way, the Scriptural example of King Joash justifies the actions of the Founders to seek independence and war with England.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Founders acted biblically, because they correctly understood King George III's abuses to be in violation of God's law – the very law that he had been entrusted to protect. Though the actions of the Founders through the war were not entirely justifiable by Just War Theory (in the cases of Probability of success and discrimination), the war itself was overall justifiable. Certainly, the Founders' faith and their adherence to the teachings of many influential philosophers impacted their decision to go to war. In the years following the revolution, these same men would again rely on their faith and beliefs to guide their hands in constructing a new government. The American Revolution, and specifically the Declaration of Independence, laid the foundation for the United States. The Declaration proves that the Founders were conscientious enough to justify their actions. Based on scriptural examples of civil disobedience, their grievances were well founded, and their actions were justified.

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