

# “O King, I Have Done No Wrong”

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Romans 13:1-2  
Daniel 6:6-23*

First a quiz (a short quiz). Who said, or rather wrote, “A little rebellion now and then is a good thing”? Right! Thomas Jefferson – in a letter to James Madison in 1786 prompted by what has been called Shay’s Rebellion – a sometimes violent uprising of Farmers angry over conditions in Massachusetts in that year.

Jefferson took rebellion further than many of his contemporaries, such as John Adams, who was of a more conservative mind in his rebelling. Adams was always fearful of anarchy.

And speaking of John (what a sequel), I wanted to be sure to get back to John Calvin, this year being his 500<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Calvin being the father, leader, Godfather of the Reformed Movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century from whence we derive our existence and history as Presbyterians. Indeed John Calvin has had an immense impact on all of Christianity, especially Western, Protestant Christianity, and Western Civilization itself!

I will but touch on one important aspect of Calvin’s much overlooked contributions to our heritage – this being the people’s relationship to their government; the governed and the government.

I’m sure you also know that this year is also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Communist regime in East Germany. Shortly thereafter the Soviet Union and the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed. Historically – Calvin and the events of 1989 are related, as are Calvin and 1776 and 1786.

John Calvin was born in France in 1509. He became a second generation Protestant reformer. He was a great intellect, a scholar. He had to flee his native home for fear of his life. Calvin believed that all of life needs to be under the lordship of Christ. This meant both rulers and their subjects were accountable to God.

He was a law and order kind of guy. He believed that government was part of God’s plan. Early on he believed as most others that passive obedience to political authority is the Christian duty. After all he knew his Bible. Look at Romans 13:1-7. “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 he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment...”

You can certainly appreciate how kings and princes would love this passage – and encourage their priests/pastors to regularly preach on such texts! Calvin (and all others, basically) took this text quiet seriously – especially for fear of chaos, and anarchy!

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century – God’s will the King! The King commands! – You obey! For God has placed the King in that position! Monarchy/aristocracy – reigned!

Yet violence in Europe was increasing, more and more blood was flowing. Calvin began to consider the possibility of active resistance against a godless ruler. Where did he go? To the scriptures!

Calvin had already written multiple volumes of Biblical commentaries, but now he began the Book of Daniel. This is where the opening came for him! You see the Bible isn't just a bunch of children's stories. Great events have evolved from its pages!

Daniel in the lions' den is one of those great stories! The children of Israel are in exile. Daniel is in the court of the Persian King Darius. Jealous rivals of Daniel plan to do him harm, unbeknownst to the King. "No prayers to any but the King for 30 days – otherwise – into the den of lions!" They knew the faithful Daniel would pray to his God openly, which he did, thus being forced to defy the King's decree! (The King – Calvin and all Christendom would have believed, whether good or evil was placed there by God.) Daniel is caught. He does not deny his devotion; his prayer. The King is not happy, for he cares for Daniel, but must keep his law. Into the den of lions. But, for Calvin here is the text (Daniel to the King) Daniel 6:22 "O King, I have done no wrong."

Listen to Calvin,

Daniel could not obey the king's edict without denying God, as we have previously seen, he did not transgress against the king by constantly persevering in that exercise of piety to which he had been accustomed, and by calling on his God three times a day.

He had not committed any crime against the king; for he was compelled to obey the command of God, and he neglected what the king had ordered in opposition to it. For earthly princes lay aside all their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights, and, as it were, to seize upon his throne and draw him down from heaven.

My friends – this was radical – to the root in the 16<sup>th</sup> century! Now - Calvin is balanced – always wary of anarchy – allowing for magistrates to resist on behalf of the people – but the movement was afoot! Active resistance!

You see, Daniel in the Bible, a Godly man – could disobey the government – Daniel rightly said – “I have done no wrong” to the king, the authority, because the authority is in fact the one who had done the wrong!!

Did you know that Calvin dedicated his Daniel commentary to the French Huguenots who were experiencing intensifying persecution against them – his own people – the French Protestants? Years later beginning in August 24, 1572, on the Feast of St. Bartholomew – Paris Huguenots; men, women and children numbering between 10,000 and 100,000 were butchered in the streets and beyond. Calvin's thoughts later provided guidance to resist tyranny. People began to proclaim that kings have their power by the people, and are answerable to the people; that rulers should be held to constitutional principles.

Two hundred years later, others were making kindred arguments across the Atlantic. At the time of our American Revolution some 70% of the population had been influenced by Calvinism. Calvin's thoughts contributed to the growth and development of our Western constitutional democracy.

Friends – we take so much for granted.

Friends – take care to appreciate our Scriptures, our interpreters such as John Calvin, and our founders such as Adams, Madison and Jefferson.

Once again “We the People” had the opportunity to cast our vote – last Tuesday – an action that has reverberations through the centuries – perhaps all the way back to young Daniel – sitting among the lions (their mouths closed) and his open, declaring a sentence that would take on further meaning centuries later – “King, I have done no wrong!”

Amen.