

On Civil Disobedience

Dub McClish

Only two spheres/sources of authority exist—human and Divine: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mat. 22:21; cf. 21:25). Divine authority is supreme—whether or not men acknowledge it—and He will eventually exercise it utterly (Mat. 25:31–46). Since the incarnation of the pre-incarnate Word in the Person of Jesus Christ, Deity has exercised Divine authority through Him. Jesus possesses “all authority...in heaven and on earth” and He is “far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Mat. 28:18; Eph. 1:21; cf. 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 1:5).

Civil authority as an entity exists with God’s sanction: “The powers that be are ordained of God...” (Rom. 13:1; cf. 1 Pet. 2:13–15), and rulers are ideally “ministers of God” (vv. 4, 6) to reward/protect good works and to punish evil works (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:13). Generally, Inspiration charges us to obey civil authorities: “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers,” and resistance amounts to withstanding God’s will (Rom. 13:1–2; cf. Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Thus Paul commands us to pray “for kings and all that are in high place” (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

In light of the foregoing, can a Christian, with the Lord’s approval, ever resist the laws of his government? The Bible clearly answers that he not only **can**, but in certain circumstances, he **must** refuse to obey them—thus engaging in “civil disobedience.” Consider some Biblical examples of such God-approved behavior:

- The midwives’ ignoring of Pharaoh’s order to slay the Hebrew newborn boys
- Moses’ resisting Pharaoh’s refusal to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt
- David’s fleeing and hiding from Saul—protracted civil disobedience
- Shadrach’s, Meshach’s, and Abednego’s refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s idol
- Daniel’s refusal to stop praying, although prohibited by law to do so
- The Magi’s defiance of Herod’s order for them to report the location of the infant Jesus

The case involving the apostles and the Sanhedrin court is particularly illustrative. Jesus had ordered them to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8), but the court ordered Peter and John, under threat, to cease preaching (4:18). When all of the apostles were arrested for resuming their preaching the court reminded them of its earlier ban. Peter responded with words for the ages whenever servants of God are faced with human-Divine law conflicts: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

As then, so always: civil government is no better than the persons who sit in seats of power and make laws, as our founding fathers well recognized. John Adams summed up this recognition: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion....” *Morality* and *religion* referred to those imposed by the Bible.

Consummately evil autocrats who neither fear God nor regard man (Luke 18:2) have for some time controlled our nation’s levers of power. The ruling of five such unelected amoral despots imposed their will upon 300+ million citizens on June 26, 2015, usurping the authority of Almighty God regarding the meaning of marriage—God’s oldest institution, predating all civil governments. This new edict places all servants of God on the wrong side of the law, portending grievous, far-reaching effects for those who refuse to bow down before it.

Let us pray that evil men and women in power will be deposed and that people who have Biblical moral values will gain influence. Let us obey civil government in every way that does not violate God’s Word, but let us steel ourselves to resist any and every law that contradicts God’s Word—whatever the cost (Rev. 2:10).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, July 5, 2015, of which I was editor.]

Attribution: From *The Scripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.