



Beyond the Ballot

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The Church in the Roman Empire

- Romans 13:1-7 & 1 Peter 2:13-17
 - Thrust of both passages from last week: Submit
 - All else in these passages modifies this main verb.
- What is Submission?
 - Going with the flow of your authorities in life, being a blessing and not a curse to them.
 - Submission is the normal Christian life.

The Church in the Roman Empire

One can well imagine Christians arguing: “The old age has passed away; we are ‘a new creation in Christ’ and belong to the transcendent, spiritual realm. Surely we, who are even now reigning with Christ in his kingdom, need pay no attention to the secular authorities of this defunct age.”

— Douglas Moo

The Apostles Arrested

- Peter preaches the first sermon and 3,000 respond on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
- Church grows to 5,000. The Jewish leaders became “greatly annoyed” and arrest the apostles (Acts 4:2-4).
- First offense: apostles freed and “warned” (Acts 4:17).
- Apostles kept preaching, the church kept growing, and the leaders were “filled with jealousy” (Acts 5:17).

The Apostles Arrested

- The apostles were arrested again but an angel opened the prison doors at night (Acts 5:18-20).
- The apostles went back to doing the same thing for which they were arrested: preaching (5:25).

“And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us’” (5:27-28).

The Apostles Arrested

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men” (5:29).

- Second offense: “Flogged” and ordered to stop preaching (5:40).

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (5:41-42).

Civil Disobedience: The refusal to comply with certain laws and regulations or the refusal to pay certain taxes and fines.

- Civil disobedience is an illegal activity.

*When would it please God to see
His people act criminally?*

Dishonor and Disobedience

- Peter urged submission (1 Pet 2:13-17)
 - “Will of God”, “Doing good”, “Show honor”
 - Not submitting is the opposite of these terms. Never told anywhere that Christians should sometimes oppose God’s will, do evil, or show dishonor.
- Dishonor doesn’t desire to go with the flow but to stand against, even delight in opposing an authority.
- Disobedience is an action often linked with dishonor. The apostles, however, disobeyed without dishonoring.

Principles from Acts 5

If we want God to be glorified in our lives, we must understand...

- 1) The condition for an act of disobedience.
- 2) The limited extent of an act of disobedience.
- 3) The heart reason for disobeying

The Condition for Disobedience

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).

The apostles couldn't obey God and man at the same time.

The Condition for Disobedience

- Acts 5 shows us that civil disobedience honors God only when government requires God's people to sin.
- The condition: No conceivable way to obey God and man.
- Test Case: The American Revolution
 - Read Declaration of Independence, 27 reasons for rebellion. Not one even mentions God or obeying Him, but all mention taxes.
 - King George III was a tyrant, but so was Nero and the apostles prayed for his salvation, showed him honor, paid their taxes, and submitted.

- Test Case: Illinois Civil Union Acts (2010)
 - What would adoption agencies who need funding do?
 - 1) Disobey God by recognizing unions and receiving funding.
 - 2) Disobey the state by receiving funds while refusing to recognize. (some level of deception to do this)
 - 3) Obey God and the state by shuttering the agency or finding alternative sources for funding.
 - Third option available in this case.
 - Using Acts 5, we disobey when a third option doesn't exist. When one can be found, this is God's will for us.

The Extent of Disobedience

How did the apostles disobey their authorities?

- They disobeyed *only* by preaching. Their disobedience went no further.
- Ex: Martin Niemöller preached and was imprisoned. Dietrich Bonhoeffer did more than preach. He elevated disobedience into rebellion and attempted to assassinate Hitler.
- The Jewish Sicarri were assassins; the apostles were not.

The Extent of Disobedience

- The apostles disobeyed *only* where the commands of God and man conflicted. They didn't fan any fire of revolution.
- They disobeyed, accepted the consequences, and went back to living under the present authorities.
- Our actions should never escalate into civil rebellion.

“Christian noncompliance to oppressive laws should be a *refusal*, but not a *revolt*” – Norm Geisler.

The Motive for Disobedience

1) The apostles received a beating so severe they could have died... Disobedience was not advantageous.

- When civil disobedience means great gain, know that the heart of man will find a way to justify it.
- The apostles gained nothing and wanted nothing except to obey Jesus Christ.

The Motive for Disobedience

2) The apostles' disobedience was motivated not by gain or vengeance but by a desire to exalt Christ.

- They rejoiced that “they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name” (5:41).
- They wanted to identify with Christ, and they couldn't if they obeyed their Jewish authorities.

FURTHER STUDY

(Curriculum, page 5)

Example of Civil Disobedience

Exodus 1:15-21
Hebrew midwives

Exodus 5:1
Moses and Aaron

2 Samuel 15:32-37
Hushai

Biblically Justified?

Yes

Why or why not?

Disobey, because murder is sinful.



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www.civilmin.org/class