

Civil Disobedience

Navigating the Authority of the State and the Church

Breakpoint
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Our people need a framework to think about the relationship between their callings.

Christians have one ultimate calling and many subordinate callings.

- **ULTIMATE CALLING:** Your one ultimate calling is to follow Jesus as Lord in every area of your life.
- **SUBORDINATE CALLINGS:** You have several other callings that are included in and governed by your ultimate calling.

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Your ultimate calling is to follow Jesus as Lord. God has also given you various subordinate callings that are included and governed by your ultimate calling. God works through you for the good of others in each of your subordinate callings.

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Human government is instituted by God.

Romans 13:1-7

1 Peter 2:13-17
Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good . . .

- To restrain and punish evil
- To protect the conditions for virtue and religious freedom

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Christians are citizens of multiple kingdoms with responsibilities to each.

- We are citizens of the earthly kingdom that God has placed us in.
- As Christians we also have citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and recognize Jesus' Lordship over ALL of life.
- Your calling as an earthly citizen is subordinate to your calling to follow Christ as King.

1 Peter 2:13-17
Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution . . .

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- God calls us to be good citizens of our earthly kingdoms.
- Because governing authorities are appointed by God our default should be obedience.

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. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment . . ."

1 Peter 2:13-17 – "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme . . ."

Titus 3:1 – "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work . . ."

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When human authority and God's authority clash, we must obey God rather than men.

- Daniel 3:1-18 (disobeying by not doing something the ruler commanded)
- Acts 4:18-20; 5:29 (disobeying by doing something the ruler forbade)
 - Acts 5:29 – "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"
- Exodus 1 – Hebrew midwives disobeying Pharaoh to kill baby boys
- Joshua 2 – Rahab hides and protects spies from the king of Jericho
- 1 Kings 18:4 – Obadiah hides 100 prophets from Queen Jezebel
- Esther 4:11, 16 – Esther breaks royal law to approach the king
- Daniel 6 – Daniel prays to the Lord in violation of Darius' law
- Revelation – Believers refusing to worship the Antichrist

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Principled disobedience is morally right sometimes.

Questions to consider:

- Is this clearly a violation of God's commands?
- Is this about something that would force me to sin if I comply?

If it would force me to sin:

- Do I have a way to appeal?
- Is this something I can compromise on without sinning?
- What are my real motives?
- If I need to prayerfully disobey, what is the best way that God would want me to do this?

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What if the law of policy does not force you to sin but is still immoral or unjust?

- What are all legitimate means of change? What is appropriate at this time?
- **Civil disobedience** can be defined as "the non-violent, public violation of some law or policy, as an act of conscience, to protest the injustice of the law or policy and (in most cases) to effect or prevent change in the law or policy."
 - Paul F. Christy, "Passive Resistance: Civil Disobedience," *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1996, 131
- Civil disobedience *may* be moral if:
 - The law being opposed is immoral
 - Every possible nondisobedient recourse has been exhausted
 - The protest is not clandestine
 - The protest actions are not violent or immoral
 - There is a willingness to accept the penalty for breaking the law

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Separation of Church and State

"God established both the church and the civil government, and He gave each its own distinct sphere of operation. The government's purposes are outlined in Romans 13:1-7 and the church's purposes in Matthew 28:19 and 20. Neither should control the other, nor should there be an alliance between the two. Christians in a free society can properly influence government toward righteousness, which is not the same as a denomination or group of churches controlling the government."

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- Does the state have NO jurisdiction within the church?
- The state does have a mandate to punish evil and protect citizens.
- **THESIS:** When the state commands something that touches the essential mission and calling of the church, we have grounds to disobey both (a) biblically, and (b) constitutionally.
- What about during a pandemic?
 - State restrictions must be: (a) temporary, (b) reasonable, and (c) generally applicable. [Albert Mohler, *The Briefing*, 10/12/20]

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Three Principles For Church Leaders to Consider:

- We should judge that the state has *more warrant* to make restrictions on the church the more that a threat is extreme, clear, and present.
- We should judge that the state has *less warrant* to make restrictions on the church the closer the interference would touch the essential mission and calling of the church.
- We should judge restrictions to have *less warrant* the less that they are temporary, reasonable, or generally applicable.

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