

SALUTING CAESAR
ROMANS 13:1-7

BIG IDEA: Civil obedience is spiritual obedience (and it will keep you out of jail, too!)

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Abortion clinic blockades and shootings, plus the recent Oklahoma City bombing have thrust the question of civil disobedience in the face of Christians all over America. On the evening news, we have watched brothers and sisters in Christ snatched from sidewalk vigils to be trucked to city jail cells. We have heard commentators link criminal acts with the religious right. You may have even met Christians who are buying guns and ammo for their home arsenal to fight off government agents. You have heard talk radio interviews about tax revolt.
 - B. We Americans are tough and independent people. We are a republic born of revolution; committed to individual rights, a government of law and freedom of religion. We don't take lightly any tampering with these fundamental things. And there is tampering going on. A lot of us are very upset. And some have taken their moral outrage to the streets. What should you do? What does the Bible teach about civil disobedience?
- I. THE PRESIDENT WAS PUT THERE BY GOD. **VERSE 1**, *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*
- A. The Rule: Christian are to be submissive to governmental authorities.
 - **Romans 13:1**, *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities."*
 - **Titus 3:1**, *"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good..."*
 - **I Peter 2:13**, *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men..."*
 - B. The Reason: God has established governmental authority, therefore to rebel against it is to rebel against God. *—Ordered government is not a human devise, but something of divine origin.* (MORRIS, 458)
 - When Pontius Pilate tried to intimidate Jesus with the words, *"Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?"* Jesus reminded him that his governmental authority was given him by God, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."* (**John 19:10-11**)
 - **Daniel 2:21**, *"[God] sets up kings and deposes them."*
 - **Daniel 4:17**, *"The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."*
- II. REBELLION AGAINST THE PRESIDENT IS ULTIMATELY REBELLION AGAINST GOD. **VERSE 2**, *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*
- A. This is the Norm—*Paul is writing in general terms to meet the need of the Romans and not legislating for every conceivable situation in which the Christian might find himself.* (MORRIS, 459)
 - B. What Are The Exceptions?
 - 1. The Choice
 - Is there ever a time when a believer should not submit to civil authority? The answer is "No." Is there ever a time a believer should disobey civil authority? The answer is "Yes." It is possible and sometimes necessary to both disobey and submit at the same time. The believer is called to do this when the civil authorities seek to compel him to behave in a manner that is sin against God.
 - It happened to **Daniel**. The king was manipulated into an unwise law that for thirty days no one could pray to any god or man, except the king. **Daniel 6:10**,

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” Daniel exercised civil disobedience because the king’s order conflicted with God’s order. But Daniel was submissive when he was thrown in the lion’s den. When God saved his life, Daniel spoke respectfully to the king. Daniel was disobedient and Daniel was submissive.

- It happened to the **Apostles**. The Jewish Sanhedrin had repeatedly ordered the Apostles to stop preaching about Jesus. *“But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.’”* (Acts 4:19). *“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’”* (Acts 5:29)
 - So the Sanhedrin *“had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. 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 Christ.”* (Acts 5:40-42). The Apostles always spoke respectfully to their national leaders. They obeyed all the laws except when the laws directly contradicted the law of God. When they were punished, they humbly submitted to it. The Apostles were disobedient and the Apostles were submissive.
2. The Consequences
- Apostles submitted to arrest, imprisonment and flogging. Ultimately the Apostle James was put to death.
 - The early Roman Christians were thrown to the lions because they would not worship Caesar as a sign of their loyalty to the state. *“In 156 A.D., church leader Polycarp was burned at the stake for refusing to declare, ‘Caesar is Lord...’”* (“Saying No to Caesar, by Rob Reynolds. Moody Monthly, July/August, 1994, p.14)
 - John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim’s Progress was *“Arrested three times for preaching without a state license and for failing to attend the Church of England, he spent twelve years in an English jail.”* (Shaeffer, Christian Manifesto, p.93)
 - German Christians took a stand in Nazi Germany when they refused in factories to put wheels on the trains that would take Jews to Auschwitz. In the Nurnberg Trials even the secular world recognized that there are limits to what a public official can do in carrying out administration policy. This international court judged many Nazi leaders as guilty of atrocious crimes, even though the defendants claimed they were simply following orders. On October 16, 1946, ten of the defendants were executed by hanging.
 - For the Christian, the example of Scripture is clear: When a Christian believes he must disobey civil authority in order to obey God, he is to humbly submit to the consequences, maintaining the healthy attitude taught in **I Peter 3:17**, *“It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”*

III. GOOD CITIZENS HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR. **VERSES 3-4**, *For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

- A. The government leader is Protector of Society --- therefore the Christian must submit and not bring punishment upon himself as a wrongdoer.
 - *The ruler is God’s servant to enable God’s other servants to get on with the job of doing God’s will.—MORRIS, 464)*
- B. The Government Leader Is a Servant of God
 - *The word servant originally signified the service of a table waiter and denotes lowly service in general.—MORRIS, 463)*

IV. GOOD CITIZENS LISTEN TO THEIR CONSCIENCE. **VERSES 5-7**, *Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶*

*This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's **servants**, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

A. Our Primary Responsibility: The Great Commission

1. Jesus didn't commission His disciples to overthrow Caesar, nor did He encourage them to infiltrate and gain control of the Jewish Sanhedrin. What He did tell them to do was to "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (**Matthew 28:19-20**)
2. It is obvious why this is so important. Non-Christians think like non-Christians. They act like non-Christians. To try to make non-Christians behave like Christians is like trying to keep the lid on a barrel that is boiling up to a great explosion. All that unpersuaded ungodliness will find some way to violently and rebelliously break forth.
3. Any attempt to try to make American behavior Christian without making American citizens Christian is ultimately doomed to failure.
4. Christian pollster George Barna laments that "*America in the 90's is rotting from the inside out.*" That's the point exactly. The rot visible on the outside is because the rot started on the inside. The only way to fix rot is to catch it on the inside, at the very root or core of things. That means we must concentrate on the winning and discipling of people to Jesus Christ. Changed hearts toward God make a changed society.

B. Our Secondary Responsibility: To be salt and light in our culture

1. I am convinced that American civilization cannot be sustained if the current course continues. The first Thanksgiving Day in America was called by Congress immediately after the Revolutionary War. **John Witherspoon**, the only pastor to sign the Declaration of Independence preached a sermon on that day and he said, "*A republic once equally poised must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty.*"
2. Without virtue, America will experience a moral meltdown, indeed we are watching it happen in our days. Unless there is a moral reawakening in our land, we will see liberty run amok with the result of ultimate barbarianism and state tyranny. We will be like Israel in the Book of Judges, where every man did that which was right in his own eyes and the nation suffered political oppression.
3. It makes no sense for the "salt and light" Christians in America to stand by silently while amoral or wicked men take our country where we don't want it to go, subverting the Judeo-Christian underpinnings of our government and culture.
4. As Christians, we have a responsibility to do what we can, and there is much that we can do, without ever stepping over the line of civil disobedience. We can vote, write letters to public officials, or phone or send faxes or make personal appointments. We can participate in public meetings, seek to influence public opinion, or run for public office ourselves. We can protest and we can initiate litigation, such as that which resulted in last Thursday's Supreme Court ruling concerning Wide Awake, a Christian student's magazine at the University of Virginia. The court ruled that the "university, by withholding [financial] aid solely from a religious magazine, had engaged in discrimination against one particular point of view." (The Herald, July 1, p.6F)
5. Too often, when Christians attempt to influence public policy in moral directions, someone shouts the platitude, "You can't legislate morality!" Yes, you can too legislate morality! Legislated morality is all around us. The Law says you can't murder, can't embezzle funds from your employer, can't perjure yourself in court, can't renege on a contract, can't have two wives. Everett just shut down an offensive adult entertainment establishment, and put new restrictions on another.

C. Our Controversial Responsibility

1. In the sixteenth century, Scottish Protestant reformer **John Knox** shocked the world by a pamphlet he published and smuggled into England from his exile in Switzerland. It was called Admonition to England. Its great significance is that for the first time in the Reformation movement, a preacher was advocating "a theology of resistance to tyranny." "*He maintained that the common people had the right and duty to disobedience and rebellion if state officials ruled contrary to the Bible. To do otherwise would be rebellion against*

God." (Shaeffer, *op. cit.*, p.97) Then after listing the revolutionary activities of Reformers country by country across Europe, **Schaeffer** concludes, "*Thus, in almost every place where the Reformation flourished there was not only religious noncompliance; there was civil disobedience as well.*" (Ibid., p.99)

2. But what does this mean to us? What are we to think when we see the limp bodies of Christian protesters being drug to paddy wagons from the entrances of abortion clinics? What are we to think when a zealot shoots an abortion doctor? What are we to think when a Christian refuses to pay income taxes when they are used to fund abortions? What are we to think when a pastor goes to jail because he refuses to submit his parochial school to state regulations?
3. Norman Geisler is dean of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. Commenting on Operation Rescue's flagrant violation of trespass laws in blocking abortion clinic entrances, he "says that of the seven examples in Scripture of justifiable civil disobedience, none fits the OR scenario. 'What all [the Scriptural examples] have in common is that the government was commanding the individual Christian to sin. We don't have that situation in the abortion controversy. If Caesar says to my wife, 'You must have an abortion,' then we disobey. But when government merely permits someone else to sin, there is no biblical justification for disobedience.'" (Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp.14-15)
4. But of course that's controversial. Operation Rescue founder, Terry Randall, refers to thinking like Norman Geisler's as 'namby-pamby, so-called reasoning.' (Reynolds, *Op. cit.*, p.15)
5. Consider the powerful argument from silence in the New Testament concerning civil disobedience. Aside from the clear instances of "voice of God vs. voice of man" issues, you don't find Jesus or the apostles advocating or practicing civil disobedience to correct social ills. For example, remember what Jesus said about paying taxes to Caesar? Matthew 22:21, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.*" Rome certainly didn't use all its tax moneys for moral purposes, but Jesus did not advocate tax rebellion.
6. When Peter tried to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane against the forces of the Sanhedrin, Jesus intervened and said, "*Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.*" (Matthew 26:52)
7. Instead of launching an abolitionist movement, Paul taught converted slaves to serve their master with wholeheartedness (Ephesians 6:5).

CONCLUSION:

- A. So keep those letters going out to Olympia and Washington. Go to the school board meetings. Run for the school board! Get involved in your local precinct. B. But most important of all, practice I Timothy 2:1-3. Talk to the King of kings about the king: "*I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness, This is good and pleases God our Savior...*"

Timothy G. Walton
Alderwood Community Church
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