

# **The Christian and Civil Disobedience**



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# ***THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE***

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The Bible clearly teaches that as time draws closer to the return of Jesus Christ Christians will face more and more persecution because of their love for the Lord and their stand upon biblical principles. In 2 Timothy 3:12 the Apostle Paul says, "*Yea, and ALL that WILL live GODLY in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer Persecution.*" This persecution upon the believer comes as the result of the rise in the "*seducing spirits*" Paul says will occur in the "*latter times*" according to 1 Timothy 4:1. In addition to what Paul says Jesus says in John 15:20 "*If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you.*" So every Christian can expect to be persecuted for the sake of Christ to one degree or another at one time or another.

There are times when that persecution will come from the government. Over the years Christians have been fined, put in jail, scourged, or even killed by the government because of not obeying laws that violated the Law of God. The common phrase used to describe what the Christians faced at that time is CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.

What all does CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE INVOLVE? Consider the following teaching.

It is significant to recognize that civil government is an institution of God. In fact civil government is the second institution God ordained in Genesis 9 after Noah and his family came out of the ark. The other institutions of God include the family (Genesis 2) and the church (Acts 2).

Romans 13:1-7 indicates what civil government is all about from God's perspective. In that text we are told that the powers of government are ordained of God and every one is to be subject to those powers. In fact, the passage teaches that anyone who resists the powers of civil government are also resisting God and will bring judgment upon themselves.

The text further teaches that civil government is established to reduce evil in the world and those who are in civil government are actually ministers of God to promote good and godly principles.

1 Peter 2:13-17 is another text in the scripture which teaches about civil government and particularly what the Christian's attitude should be toward authority. Specifically verse 13 says, "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*" and verse 15 goes on to say "*For so is the will of God.*"

But what if the civil government orders Christians to do that which violates the law of God? Acts 5:29 is clear on how to respond accordingly when it says through the inspired words of Peter and the apostles, "*We ought to obey God rather than man.*" Doing so is CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE that is sanctioned by God Himself.

So, how is CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE defined? It is *the deliberate act of disobeying civil government because of personal conviction when a civil law or authority commands one to violate the principles of scripture or expects personal disobedience to the will of God.*

Historically there have been at least three separate views of CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.

The first view is anarchist. The anarchist view says that a person can choose to disobey the government whenever he or she like and whenever he or she feels personally justified in doing so. Such a stance is NOT biblical.

The second view is extremist patriot. The extremist patriot view says that a person should always follow and obey his government no matter what the command may be. Such a stance is also NOT biblical.

The third view is biblical submission. The biblical submission view says that Christians are allowed and encouraged to act in disobedience to the government if it commands evil, such that it requires a Christian to act in a manner that is contrary to the clear teachings of the Word of God. It is the biblical submission view of CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE that Acts 5:29 is teaching.

The Bible gives a lot of examples of CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. Here are just a few to consider.

In Exodus 1, the Egyptian Pharaoh gave a command to two Hebrew midwives to kill all male Jewish babies. However, the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh and let the boys live one of which was Moses.

In Joshua 2, Rahab the harlot disobeyed a command from the King of Jericho to produce the Israelite spies who entered the city to gain intelligence for battle. Instead she hid them and let them go and was saved from the city's destruction when Joshua and the Israeli Army destroyed it.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden idol in disobedience to King Nebuchadnezzar's command and God protected them in the fiery furnace.

In Daniel 6, Daniel defied King Darius' decree to not pray to anyone other than the King and God protected him in the den of lions.

In Acts 4, after Peter and John healed the lame man they were arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus and were put in jail. The religious authorities commanded them not to preach in the name of Jesus but they continued to do so out of obedience to the Great Commission and God protected them.

Down through the history of the Church many Christians practiced CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. In doing so, some were delivered and some became martyrs. Every one of them were blessed by God on earth or rewarded in Heaven.

Why is CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE allowed and encouraged by God for Christians?

It is because Christians have dual citizenship. Not only is a Christian a citizen of the earthly nation in which he or she lives, but is also a citizen of heaven according to Philippians 3:20 that says, "*For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Therefore the first responsibility of the Christian is to obey the ordinances of the higher divine entity, which is Heaven.

One of the ways to prevent persecution that may lead to CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE is to pray for those in authority. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 tells us to pray for those in authority "*that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*" It stands to reason that the more we pray for our governmental leaders the less we will be persecuted.

In summary the guidelines for a Christian's CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE is as follows:

- Christians should resist a government that commands or compels evil and should work nonviolently within the laws of the land to change a government that sanctions such evil.
- Civil disobedience is permitted when the government's laws or commands are in direct violation of God's laws and commands.
- If a Christian disobeys an evil government, unless he or she can flee from that government, the right attitude is to accept that government's punishment with all grace and humility and without resistance.
- Christians are encouraged to work to install new government leaders within the laws that have been established.
- Christians are commanded to pray for their leaders and for God to intervene in His time and way to change any ungodly commands expected by government.



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