

Civil Disobedience

September 20, 2015

Most mainstream, modern, evangelicals are in agreement with the Biblical teaching against abortion or same sex marriage and many have participated in marches or rallies and may have even considered being involved in protest or affiliating with groups focused on these issues. Today, I would like to consider some of the principles that should shape our behavior when considering whether to participate in an activity that is in disobedience to the civil magistrate and perhaps extend those principles to other areas of life where we are called to submit to those whom God has placed over us.

❖ Biblical Actions Are Not Always Motivated Biblically

- ◆ Frequently, good things are done for the wrong reasons. There may be some question as to the appropriateness of some activity and perhaps it can be shown explicitly in Scripture that the activity is permissible. This does not excuse doing it for the wrong reasons. Bad reasons for doing good things are not justified by the fact that the things are good. Therefore, when it comes to civil disobedience, we must have both our intentions and our actions conform to the Word of God.

❖ Christians Obey God, Not Man

Acts 4:18-20

- ◆ As we have established before, God has instituted three (or four) elementary forms of government; Family, Church, State and Self. Although we are called to submit to these governments, each of them is to acknowledge that they exist as servants of the God who established them. However, we live in a fallen world where these governments have fallen people holding offices and it is likely that the situation will arise where the government forgets its proper position and demands that its subjects violate a higher law of God. We should not be surprised when this occurs, but we should be equipped when this occurs, so that we might respond in such a way as to ensure that God's commands are not violated.

❖ Because We Obey God and Not Man, We Obey the Governing Authorities

Titus 3:1-2

- ◆ In recognition of the fact that God is the supreme authority and He has established other authorities (subordinate to Him) over us, we live our lives in subjection to the civil authorities.
- ◆ In addition to being honorable toward the governing authorities, it is important that we are gracious and humble toward those who don't choose to join the rally or participate the exact same way that you have chosen to participate. Regardless of the issue being debated, Christians are always to consider others more highly than themselves and demonstrate humility at all times.
- ◆ People who *want* to disobey the law must not be included in the activities. If we are characterized as those who are scofflaws then we have diminished the impact that our disobedience may have upon the unsaved. In order to disobey the authorities that God has placed over us, we must be *qualified* to do so. This means that we must be characterized as those who vigorously strive to obey those authorities over us and, if the time comes where we must disobey, we do so reluctantly *and* vigorously.

❖ The Bible Is Entirely True, But Not All Biblical Truths Are Equally Important

Mark 3:1-6

- ◆ When a situation arises where a Christian is commanded to violate a Biblical principle, he must plan his response with wisdom. One principle which should guide our thinking is that while all Biblical truths are equally *true*, they are not all equally *important*. There are weightier matters of the law of God and there are some doctrines of first or primary importance.

❖ God Has Established A Division of Labor Within The Unified Body

1 Cor 12:14-20

- ◆ God, in His wisdom has given many different gifts within His Church for the sake of edifying the Body of Christ. While one person in the group is equipped to respond in one Biblical way to a situation, and another in the Church responds in a different but equally Biblical way, we should take this diversity as a blessing from God and not attempt to squelch God's blessing.
- ◆ One of the marks of a movement which may not be solidly founded is the claim that their actions are the sole appropriate way to be obedient to God on the issue. While it is possible to think of a scenario where that may be true, for most situations in life, a mind of wisdom is necessary in order to know that our thoughts are Biblical.

❖ Our Conscience Is Not An Infallible Messenger From God

Hebrews 5:14

- ◆ God speaks to us in a number of ways. One of these ways is through our consciences where God's convictions speak to us and direct us in ways that will bring glory to Him and obedience to us. However, our conscience is not infallible and must be brought into submission to Christ and be renewed by the Word. God does speak to us infallibly in His Word and it is there that we turn to shape our minds to discern good from evil.
- ◆ When considering whether one is in a position that requires disobedience, we must first determine what command of God would I be disobeying by obeying this law of man? Answering this question can often be made more difficult by the emotions brought on by the situation. It is best to seek counsel and search the Scriptures to determine the proper response. Just because there is some topic which is near-and-dear to your heart does give permission to disobey the authorities that God has placed over us.

❖ We Must Have a Zeal for the Holiness of God Not for Issues

Psalms 83

- ◆ Notice that the anger that the author of this psalm reveals is directed toward the enemies of God. He is motivated not by the violation of his personal rights but rather by the zeal for the name and glory of God to be exalted.
- ◆ Emotion and sentiment are gifts given to us by God for certain reasons. However, when these two gifts become our primary source of motivation for the things we do, our actions are short-lived. They are not long-term motivators. What does motivate us and shape our thinking for the longhaul are the truths which God has revealed plainly to us in His Word. Long-term motivation is created by principle, not emotion. A principle which would influence the types of actions regarding civil disobedience is our jealousy for the holiness of God and our respect for His law and Word.

❖ We Should Pray that God Would Bless Us With Godly Leaders

1 Timothy 2:1-2

- ◆ Because God established that all authority has been given to His Son, the difficult situations we find ourselves in do not happen apart from His sovereignty. In addition, God holds the heart of the king in His hand and all things happen according to His will. Therefore, it is proper for us to beseech the Lord to grant us godly leaders so that we might live quite and peaceful lives and so that the Gospel might go out fruitfully.