

# Civil Disobedience

January 28, 1995

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In response to last week's anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade abortion rights decision, there was a rally at our State's capital as well as many others organized throughout the nation. This was a largely successful event although many in the media covered the pro-life activities sparsely.

Most mainstream, modern, evangelicals are in agreement with the Biblical teaching against abortion and many have participated in marches or rallies and may have even considered being involved in a movement like Operation Rescue.

Today I would like to consider the principles that should shape our behavior when considering whether to participate in an activity that is in disobedience to the civil magistrate.

- **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.

- **Christians Obey God, Not Man**

Acts 4:18-20

*<sup>18</sup> And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.<sup>20</sup> "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." NKJV*

- As we have established before, God has instituted three elementary forms of government; Family, Church and State. Although we are called to submit to these governments, each of them are 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 in them 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

*Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,<sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. NKJV*

- 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 in a rescue. 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 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.

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

## Mark 3:1-6

*And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand.<sup>2</sup> So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.<sup>3</sup> And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."<sup>4</sup> Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.<sup>5</sup> And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.<sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. NKJV*

- When a situation arises where a Christian is called on 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 situation and another in the Church responds in a different but equally Biblical way, we should take this diversity at 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

*<sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. NKJV*

- 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.
- **We Must Have a Zeal for the Holiness of God Not for Issues**

## Psalms 83

- 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 long haul 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**