

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 20- Luke 20:19-26**

306- The Relationship Between the Christian and Human Government- Part 3

March 13, 2016

Luke 20:19-26

19 The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

20 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.

21 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth.

22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

23 But He detected their trickery and said to them,

24 **"Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?"** They said, "Caesar's."

25 And He said to them, **"Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."**

26 And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

To the Glory of God

Now back in 312AD- the Roman Emperor, Constantine, issued what has become known as "The Edict of Milan". And this Edict legalized Christianity within the Roman Empire. So for the first time since the Resurrection, Christianity went from being a *persecuted* and *illegal* religion to being the State-sponsored religion of the known world.

And this was the beginning of what became known as “Christendom” which was the “marriage” between Church and State.

Now, at first, this was a wonderful thing. The horrific persecution that the Roman Government had perpetrated on believers for over three centuries came to a halt- almost overnight. And so Christian men went off to work and actually came home again that night because they weren’t arrested and taken off to jail for their faith. Pastors were no longer put into prison for preaching the Gospel, and the practice of throwing Christians to the lions for sport so that the elite could watch the wild animals tear godly men and women to shreds- stopped.

So there was great rejoicing at how God had brought peace to the Church. People were literally dancing in the streets. Some even said that since God had used Constantine to bring about this peace that perhaps his ascent into the leadership of the Roman Empire was the Second Coming of Christ.

Now one of the results of the Edict of Milan was not only to stop the persecution, but to actually bring in a season of great prosperity to believers, because the law commanded the businesses and the local rulers to return all the money and the property that had been stolen from the Church and the people of God over the previous 300 years. And because the Emperor himself had supposedly converted to Christianity, it became fashionable for every politician and every business owner to join the faith of the Emperor, even if it was in name only.

For 30 consecutive decades Christians had lived under the constant threat of immediate and total annihilation. Governmental authorities came in the middle of the night and took away a wife or a husband or even a child, and they were never seen again. Christian parents were betrayed by their own children, prayer meetings were raided, baptismal services were interrupted, wives were made widows and children were made orphans, all because of the Gospel. Truly the success of the Gospel was bathed in the blood of the martyrs.

But with the stroke of a pen, that all changed. Christianity was now the de-facto religion of the Roman Empire. And so it was now the unbeliever and the agnostic and the atheist who began to be shunned and ostracized and left behind. Suddenly, how much you loved Jesus and how strong your faith was became the criteria for promotion and raises and advancement, not only in business, but also in the

Government. So not only were people no longer being punished for being a Christian, they were penalized politically and socially and economically if they were *not* believers.

Now any day when the people of God are not being slaughtered is a good day. I am certainly not in favor of being persecuted. But as fallen human beings we have to understand that we have an enormous capacity to take something wonderful and pollute it. We can take a beautiful thing and turn it into something hideous and terrible, and we can take a blessing and turn it into a reproach to God. And that is precisely what happened with the advent of this marriage between the Church and the State called "Christendom".

Soon the rejoicing over this new found peace died down and the people of God began to do what all humans do with peace and prosperity; they became fat and dumb and happy. Because they were allowed to now make and keep money, believers worked hard to acquire more and more of this world's goods. And, of course, they had to take care of all the shiny new stuff that their prosperity afforded them, and so Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies went unattended because who had time to pray anymore? Before, God's people prayed they could live long enough to declare the Gospel to one more soul, but now God was blessing and they wanted to be a part of that new wave of God's Glory.

Fasting went out of style and Biblical concepts like "dying to self", "mortifying the deeds of the body", "separation from sin", "crucifying the flesh", "pursuing Holiness on purpose", "hungering and thirsting after Righteousness", and the Divine Command to "not love this present evil world", that had been the collective testimony of the Church for over 300 years, fell by the wayside. Ancient writings that we have discovered tell us that some leaders in the church of that day even suggested that the Call to press into the things of God had been done away with because obviously God was doing a new thing.

And the longer this new found peace and prosperity went on, the worse things got until many in the Church got to the point where they were simply unwilling to defend the Faith against any and all heresies began to creep in. And so it is no coincidence that this was a time when false teaching almost overran the Church. It was deemed to be infinitely more important to keep what they had than it was to risk losing their freedom and material wealth over a few areas of theology that nobody really cared about anyway.

And so the Church became powerful in the earth, and it became wealthy and it became politically connected to the point where the leaders of the Church were handpicking kings and assigning positions of leadership to the people who carried their favor. And so with this new power and prosperity came corruption and arrogance and sin at the highest positions in the Church. And it wasn't long before every conceivable human wickedness began to be true, not only about Mankind, in general, but it became true with the men who were commissioned to carry and proclaim Divine Truth. And so blackmail and sexual sins and backstabbing and assassinations and bribery and murder and plotting and political shenanigans became rampant in the Church as one group was constantly jockeying with another group for power and prestige.

And the Grace of God became hidden, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ was covered over with ecclesiastical trinkets and man-made teachings, and the Sacraments were elevated way beyond their Biblical position as not merely things we were told to do until Jesus came back, but they elevated to being the cause of Salvation itself.

This is what happens when you have Christendom rather than Christianity. This is what happens when there is an unholy marriage between the Church and the State. When God's people are neck deep in politics to the point where the Gospel becomes secondary and the essential Truths become obscure, it is no long an issue of what believers are willing to die for. It becomes an issue of what believers are willing to kill for to obtain and keep their political power. And at that point, God has to sovereignly intervene to rescue His Church or all will be lost.

We operate best when the Church is set apart from the Government, which allows us to speak Truth to power, and so we can call political leaders to repentance and hold them accountable. We operate best when there is a little bit of space between the Church and the State so we can see clearly enough to maintain the purity of the Gospel while also actively participating in the political process.

And so we must pray and struggle to preserve this delicate balance between being politically active while not being sucked into the process to the point that we lose our souls. Listen, we *can* and we *should* participate in the campaigning and election of our leaders. We *can* and we *should* offer ideas and set goals and help to arrive at a more perfect union. And some of us should even run for office. Some of us

have been called by God to run for Office. And so I am *not* advocating isolationism. I am *not* advocating pulling away and running off into the mountains to wait for Jesus to come back. I am *not* saying that we should withdraw and not be good citizens.

All I am doing is seeking for us to not make the very same mistakes that godly and trusting believers made 1700 years ago. Nobody back in the 300's said, "*Let's all get so deep into Government that we lose the Church.*" Nobody thought that way. That's wasn't the plan. Yet, that is exactly what happened. And it happened one inch at a time. Because Christendom doesn't work. The unholy alliance between Church and State didn't work back then, and it won't work today.

So what I am saying is that the Church of Jesus Christ in America is not a "voting block" that is waiting for some candidate or some political party to use for their own agenda. The Church is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth. We are the repository of the Revelation of the Owner and Creator of the Universe. We have been given the Authority by the Lord Christ Himself to tell every single human being from every nation on earth:

If you hear and believe the Gospel that we preach to you and if unconditionally surrender and end your rebellion against God- and if you put your full faith and trust in Jesus and in His finished Work- all of your sins will be forgiven and you will spend eternity in Heaven with God. And if you reject the Gospel that we preach and you continue your High Treason against God- you will not be forgiven and you will spend all of eternity in a devil's hell.

And so with all due respect to the deceived Mormon who made this slogan famous, the Truth does not lie with him. The Truth lies here, in the Church of the First Born.

We must understand that the Church represents the only people on the face of the earth for whom Christ died. Every single human being from ever nation, Jew or Gentile, who has been chosen for Salvation from before the foundation of the world, will belong to the Church of Jesus. That is who the Church is, the called and chosen ones. And so those of us who have already been saved have already been

bought and paid for, and therefore, we are not for sale to any man for any price.

And that is why our Message is clear, our Eye is single, our Voice is loud, our Step is sure, our Hope is secure, our Vision is clean, our Future is assured, our Souls are sealed, our Minds are convinced, our Hearts are transformed, our Face is like flint, and our Purpose doesn't waver.

Now last week- we looked at just what Jesus meant by what He said here in **Luke 20:25** about Caesar and God by looking at what God the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write over in **Romans 13**- so let's go there with me again to read that Passage.

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Now, as we saw last week, it would be impossible for anyone to write a more all-encompassing, absolute, or utterly unqualified statement than the one Paul has given here in verse 1:

Every person [literally every *soul*] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.

Yet there *are* limits to this obedience and submission. But I would suggest that the place to begin is not with the limits themselves, but by

seeking to understand the nature of the authority that has been given to civil rulers. The key word is *authority*, which occurs six times in these verses.

And two Greek words are used of political power that are closely connected, but need to be distinguished:

Kratos= "the naked power of rule." And this can refer to both legitimate and illegitimate power, as in the case of the devil, who, we are told in **Hebrews 2:14** has "**the power of death**", but who will lose that power when Jesus returns. His power will be taken away, and he will be cast into the lake of fire.

This word has proved useful in describing the various types of human government. For example, *Demos* means: *people, crowd, or public assembly*, while *Ploutos* means: *wealth*. So a "Democracy" means ruling by the people (or by many people). And a "Plutocracy" is a system of Government where only the rich (or the aristocrats) rule.

So when we speak of *power (kratos)* we recognize that there can be both *legitimate* and *illegitimate* power. And, of course, Christians are under no obligation to obey a power that is illegitimate. Just because a man with a gun orders us to do something does not mean that we should do it necessarily. At that moment, the man has power, but his power over us is illegitimate. And in that case, what we need is a legitimate governmental power, a policeman, to subdue him.

The other word that is used of power, as well as other kinds of power, is *Exousia*, which is the word Paul uses here in **Romans 13**. *Exousia* refers to a *delegated power*- power that is given to a person or group of persons by someone else. And Paul uses this here in **Romans 13** because he wants to make explicit that the authority of all human government is from God.

And because all of their authority is delegated to them by God that means that all human authority is accountable to God for how they exercise their power. And that is the important thing. The Bible teaches that all human Government is "under God", meaning that it is always *responsible* to God, precisely because God is the One Who has given them their power. So here in one word is both the *legitimacy* and the necessary *accountability* of all human government.

And an important example of this is Jesus Christ's trial before

Pontius Pilate. As far as the Romans were concerned Jesus was tried for Treason, because, as His accusers put it, He:

“claim[ed] to be a king” (John 19:12).

And it did not take Pilate long to discover that the kind of Kingdom Jesus was talking about was no direct threat to Rome, because it was a Kingdom of Truth. Jesus told him:

John 18:37b

... I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

And as soon as he heard that, Pilate knew that this was a *religious* matter and was of no concern to him. Yet the leaders of the people were still clamoring for Jesus' death, and it became clear that Pilate was soon going to bow to their wishes. He wanted to help Jesus, but Jesus was not speaking to him.

John 19:10b

... You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?

And it was at this point Jesus replied with one of two classic texts for helping us understand the God-given role of civil government and the right relationship of the Church to the State. Jesus answered:

John 19:11

... You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin.

And the word that is translated *power* in this verse is the same word that Paul uses in **Romans 13**, and it is used in exactly the same way. So the authority that was given to Pilate was a *delegated* authority, because it had been given to him by God. But we need to understand that it was a *real* and *true* authority. Pilate absolutely had the right to try Jesus and render judgment as saw fit. Yet, at the same time, Pilate was accountable to God for what he did and for how he did it. And that is why Jesus was able to remind him,

... for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin

The sin of the Jewish leaders was *infinitely* greater than the sin of Pilate, because they were sinning against the Scriptures, which pointed to Jesus and were fulfilled by Jesus, and against their consciences, as even Pilate recognized (**“It was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him,” Matthew 27:18**). Nevertheless, Pilate was also sinning by condemning an innocent man, and he would have to answer to God for that.

So Pilate had authority in Christ's trial. And he could decide as he wished. And sadly, he decided wrongly. But the Scriptures teach that he had that authority to make that decision, even if it was wrong. And this is because his authority was from God. So at no time did Jesus suggest that authority should be taken *away* from Pilate, even when he had made so great an error as condemning the Son of God. So the example of Jesus before Pilate shows us that for Christians revolution for the sake of revolution alone (“I would rather be king than you”) is wrong.

So, instead of being revolutionaries, genuine Christians are obligated to be the very best citizens possible, even of brutal and pagan Governments. We should obey speed limits, pay our taxes honestly, vote in elections, and in all other respects respond with respect and compliance to those whom God has set over us.

Yet, this in no way means that Christians are merely to be lap dogs lying down in the face of evil and doing nothing to oppose it. Again, we have our example in Jesus. Jesus never showed disrespect to Pilate. He never warned him that if he failed to rule justly Jesus' followers would rise up and do their best to unseat him and the Roman government. Jesus knew what the governor would do, and He accepted it as being from God- which it surely was. But even at that, we see that Jesus was not silent. He spoke Truth, which He had been sent to make known, and Jesus reminded Pilate that Pilate was sinning and would, therefore, one day himself have to answer to God for it.

And that is our role. We speak often today of the “separation” of Church and State, and we should be thankful for that separation. It is a dearly won liberty to have a Church that is free from government interference or control, and to have a State that is free from clerical

domination. *But, the separation of Church and State does not mean the separation of God and State.* And though the Church does not rule over the State, and should not, we have a Divine Duty to speak out against the civil ruler's sins and remind the governing authorities that they are ultimately accountable to God, from Whom all their authority comes.

But that means that we are accountable to God as well. We are accountable to speak up. The Church does not have the power of the sword. That is reserved for the civil authorities, as Paul will show in **Romans 13:4**. Our weapon is Truth because we are a Kingdom of the Truth. But we must understand that the Truth is much stronger than the sword anyway. So, we are to be condemned if we do not wield the sword of Truth powerfully.

Now left to ourselves, we are like those described in the last verse of the Book of Judges where it says:

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

And this is why Paul insists in **Romans 13:1** that we are to obey secular authorities; The State is God's wise Provision for avoiding anarchy.

And now having been told that we must obey the authorities, the next two verses of **Romans 13** give us reasons why we should.

1. If we disobey the State we will be disobeying God, and God Himself will punish us (v. 2)
2. The Government will also punish us (v. 3).

So Jesus' enemies came to Him with a trick question in our Passage in **Luke 20:22**:

Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?

And Jesus' Words here in response to the question about taxes suggest four options that I have found useful in dealing with this matter of the State's authority and the rightful limits of a Christian's compliance with it:

1. God alone as the Authority with the Authority of Caesar denied,
2. Caesar alone as the Authority with the Authority of God denied,
3. The Authority of both God and Caesar, but with Caesar in the dominant position
4. The Authority of both God and Caesar, but with God in the dominant position.

So let's look at each one.

1. *God alone as the Authority.* The first option is one some Christians have embraced at some periods of history, especially when the State has become excessively oppressive or corrupt. In the early Church, some people called "anchorites" went off into the desert, thus separating themselves from all social contacts and living, as they believed, solely for the service of God. And from that early movement "Monasticism" was born.

Now it would be an error to think that this has been practiced only in the early Church or by members of monastic orders. Monasticism is also the practical approach of many evangelical Christians in our day who so separate themselves from the secular world that they withdraw from the surrounding culture, refuse to participate in elections, have only Christian friends, or will work only for Christian companies. This is a form of Monasticism and it isn't any more biblical now than it was then.

2. *Caesar alone as the Authority.* The second option is that of most secularists and sometimes even of so-called Christians: the choice of Caesar alone. It was the way chosen by the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ's trial, when they told Caesar (incredibly, in view of their past and their knowledge of the Old Testament),

"We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

And this is the most dangerous of the four options, because if God is completely left out, Caesar is left with no ultimate accountability. He has nothing to restrain his whims or cruelty and will soon descend into barbarity.

In America, we recognize the need for checks upon governmental power, so each of our three main branches of government has a check on the others. For example, the President (of the Executive Branch) appoints Supreme Court Justices (of the Judicial Branch), but if the president gets out of line, the Senate (part of the Legislative Branch) can impeach him. The President may initiate programs, but it is the Congress who must fund them. And as for Congress, it can make laws, but the President may refuse to sign them (the power of the veto), or the Judicial Branch can declare them unconstitutional. The Supreme Court is carefully protected out of respect for our laws. We claim to be a nation governed by laws, not by men. But the Court cannot initiate legislation, it can only pass on it, and the President has the power to appoint the Justices.

Now we have created this system of “checks and balances” because we recognize that power corrupts, even the best of men, and so we look at people in positions of power as needing to be held accountable. But, if that is true on the merely human level, how much truer is it on the spiritual level. The Bible declares in **Psalm 2** that human rulers regularly conspire against God. So, if we forsake all influence of God in our Government, we are left at the mercy of our human governors.

3. The Authority of God and Caesar, but with Caesar in the dominant position. The third option is one many persons would claim, but it is the position of cowards. This is because if God’s Authority is recognized at all, it must be supreme simply because God is supreme by definition. That is part of what it means to be God. So if anyone claims to obey the State *before* God, or *rather* than God, while nevertheless still believing in God, it can only be because he is afraid of what Caesar can do to him.

And this was the case with Pilate. He knew Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him. And so Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent and even tried to release Him. But, in the end, Pilate was a political coward, and so he gave in and had Jesus crucified. Why? Because, he was afraid of Caesar. Toward the end of the trial, when Pilate was holding out against their wishes, the Jewish authorities played their trump card, crying out:

“If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar” (John 19:12).

And Pilate, who feared Caesar and wanted to be a friend of Caesar more than anything else in the entire world, gave in and thus condemned the sinless Son of God.

The irony is that Pilate ultimately failed to secure Caesar's friendship because a few years later he was forcibly removed from office by the proconsul of Syria, and was banished to France, where he died, completely discredited.

4. *The Authority of God and Caesar, but with God in the dominant position.* The last option is the only valid one: God and Caesar, but with God in the dominant position. And it was the position Jesus articulated when He said:

render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Because Christians recognize the authority of the State, they are (or should be) the very best of citizens, in two ways.

A. They should obey the State in all areas of its legitimate authority.

As I said in the last week- we should obey the speed limits, pay our taxes honestly, vote in elections, support worthy civic endeavors, speak well of our rulers, and support and pray for them. Calvin expressed this well when he wrote, "We are not only subject to the authority of princes who perform their office toward us uprightly and faithfully as they ought, but also to the authority of all who, by whatever means, have got control of affairs, even though they perform not a whit of the princes' office."¹

B. Christians should be the very best of citizens also by opposing the State verbally and by acts of noncompliance whenever the Government strays from its legitimate God-given function or transgresses the moral Law of God. And we are to do this chiefly by words- that is, by rational argument- *not* by coercive power. The power of the sword is the State's, *not* ours. Nevertheless, we are also to *resist* and even *disobey* the State when necessary.

¹ John Calvin; *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Chapter 20

And our resistance and disobedience seems to be limited in the Bible to three main areas:

- ✓ The Proclamation of the Word
- ✓ Moral Conduct
- ✓ Civil Disobedience

Limitation Number One: The Proclamation of the Word

The first area in which Christians cannot recognize the authority of the government, and must, therefore, disobey it is whenever the State forbids the preaching of the Gospel or Evangelism. This is because Christians have a God-given Duty and Responsibility to preach, teach, and evangelize. And we call that Duty and Responsibility "The Great Commission". Jesus said, **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation"** (Mark 16:15). He told the eleven, **"Go and make disciples of all nations"** (Matthew 28:19). He said, **"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"** (The Acts 1:8).

And what must happen when the ruling authorities demand differently is illustrated in **The Acts 4&5**. The disciples had been preaching in Jerusalem, but they had created such a stir that the leaders of the people called them in, and meeting in solemn assembly, commanded that the Apostles keep silent. Peter and John replied:

The Acts 4:19b&20

19 ...Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

The Apostles were threatened and released, but they went right back to their preaching. They were arrested again.

The Acts 5:28

We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

It was then that the Apostles replied:

“We must obey God rather than men” (v. 29).

Now this incident makes clear that Christians are to give preference to the preaching of the Gospel and are *not* to cease from it even though commanded to do so by the civil authorities. And as we saw last time, we may suffer for this, but we are to do it. Many of the early preachers were arrested and beaten. Some were killed. But they evangelized anyway. We need to remember this in our age, which is becoming increasingly intolerant of any public articulation of Christian faith and truth.

But at no time did the Apostles seek to overthrow the evil Government that had them beaten. They simply disobeyed the law when that law told them to stop preaching, and then they suffered the consequences of their disobedience without complaint.

Limitation Number Two: Morality

A second biblical limit on obedience to human authorities is in moral areas affecting Christian conduct. No government has the right to command Christians to perform immoral or non-Christian acts. For example, during the Nazi era Christians in Germany were faced with a devilish state and its openly anti-Christian and even antihuman practices. German citizens were commanded to have no dealings with the Jews. They were not to trade with them, have friendships with them, or even acknowledge them. This was an unjustified demand on Christians to behave immorally, and those who disobeyed these laws were right to do so. And we have several examples:

- ✓ Corrie ten Boom and her family were right to hide Jews and thus try to save their lives.
- ✓ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right to speak out against Hitler, organize an underground Church, and strengthen its opposition and witness.
- ✓ Martin Niemöller was right to go on preaching the Truth even to the point of being imprisoned for it. We are told that another minister visited him in jail and argued that he would be set free if

only he would compromise and agree to keep silent about certain subjects. *"So why are you in jail?"* he concluded. Martin Niemoller replied, *"Why are you not in jail?"*

In our Country Christians must also speak out against wickedness in any of its manifestations. And at the present moment in America, it is unlikely that you will be imprisoned for speaking out against these things, even though that may come in the near future.

But you might well lose your job for refusing to be dishonest, or for calling those who are not honest to account, or for standing up against immoral behavior. And the result is that you might lose your chance for promotion, or be cut out of the leadership circle, or fined, or put out of business. No matter. You must still speak up, and you must act justly even if you are pressured to comply.

Limitation Number Three: Civil Disobedience

There is a third area in which Christians must disobey the State, but this one is a difficult one in which to remain truly Biblical, *especially* when the State flagrantly ignores either righteousness or justice, and those who are sensitive to these wrongs feel the need to do more than merely speak out. This one differs from the previous area in that the former limitation concerned times in which Christians are pressured to act immorally themselves and must refuse, while this refers to government immorality and the need for Christians to do something to change it.

We generally speak of this as "civil disobedience", and there are many excellent examples of it having been done rightly and with success. The Civil Rights movement of the sixties is a good example. The problem is that as soon as we move away from words only (that is, speaking the Truth and calling the rulers to account) and into the area of direct action, it is very easy to cross over the line into a wrong method of responding, and, thus, become guilty not merely of breaking an unjust law, but of breaking just and even moral laws. Let me give three examples.

1. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. I have already commended Dietrich Bonhoeffer for his stand against the evils of the Nazi state. And this man is also to

be commended for courageously returning to Germany from America, where he was living at the time, to help the struggling Church and give it leadership. But Bonhoeffer was not executed for speaking out against Nazism. He was executed for being involved in a plot to *assassinate* Adolf Hitler. And while we might understand how he might have felt that assassination was the only course left to him to stop the growing evil, as Bible believing Christians we must know that desperation does *not* make murder acceptable. And so at this point, Bonhoeffer clearly went beyond any possible Biblical sanction.

We can also contrast his conduct with that of King David in his struggle against King Saul. God had already removed His Blessing from Saul, and Saul was seeking David's life. David did not have to wait in Jerusalem to be killed. He had every right to flee. This was a form of disobedience. But David did not cross over the line and try to kill Saul. On the contrary, David spared Saul's life on at least two different occasions while he waited for God to remove him, which God eventually did.

Jesus told Peter,

Matthew 26:52b

... all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.

2. *Abortion Protests.* The second example is often on our minds because it is current: the attempt of Christians to stem the terrible destruction of human life through abortions, which are completely legal by today's laws. This effort is best exemplified by various groups who engage in protests at Abortion Clinics.

Now when I am talking about the abortion problem, as I often do, I usually challenge the blockading of abortion clinics on the basis of the methodology being used. I say that we live in a television age and that television turns our tactics against us to the point of our losing the PR battle against this great evil.

I suggest to you that television networks are basically sympathetic to the Abortion Cause, and so they will never record a serious discussion about the true nature of abortion or the value of a life made in the Image of God conducted between an anti-abortionist and a woman who is considering an abortion. They would lose all public

support and so they will never do this. In their mind it is simply not good television.

But as soon as a restraining order is issued and the police arrive to begin arresting the demonstrators and placing them in paddy wagons, then the cameras roll. Because then they can frame the image of people who oppose abortion as being silly and violent and who want to take away a woman's right to choose. So, it is an image problem, not a problem about substance. And so that is a problem the pro-life people need to consider carefully.

But that is not the issue here. There is nothing wrong with being arrested in itself, especially in the effort to save lives. The problem in this area is the carryover from mere protest and the attempt to persuade people by speaking the truth to breaking, otherwise, perfectly valid laws, like rights of private property, freedom of movement, and even murder.

We can applaud the courage of those who demonstrate. And we should endorse the issues they represent. But we must also say that it is not right to trespass on others' property. It is not right to make it difficult for people to enter abortion clinics, if they choose to do so. And above all, it is not right to invade the clinics, destroy records and equipment, or do things that are even worse like bomb them or kill the doctors.

The problem in this area can be seen in the cases where pro-abortion demonstrators are shot and where doctors who perform abortions are assassinated. These acts are not courageous or godly. They are acts of murder and are sinful.

3. Homosexual Marriage

The third area is one that has recently come to the door of the Church. And as we have gone over in great detail- Marriage has already been decided and defined by none other than God Himself, and so I reject any attempt by any person or any group or any authority or any government to redefine Marriage and then force me as a Pastor to perform it. I am more than willing to suffer whatever God allows to come my way, but rest assured I will not bow my knees to this issue, ever.

However, it is sinful to ostracize homosexuals into some special category of sinners, and, therefore, we are to feed them when they are

hungry, and we are to cloth them when they are naked, and we are to house them when they need shelter, and we are to love them and make sure they are not treated in an un-christlike way.

But we are to tell homosexuals the Truth and compel them to repent and to turn away from their sin and be saved. So, whereas I will not join in or celebrate their so-called "wedding"- I *will* celebrate their birthday and I *will* celebrate their graduation or their promotion at work and I will mow their yard and I will invite them over for lunch.

And I want to make every allowance for the right exercise of the consciences of other people in these areas who may disagree with my specifics. I understand that many feel they must do *something* to attract attention to the evil that exists rather than do *nothing*. But we must understand that breaking laws or acting immorally in order to make a dramatic point is the ultimate logic of *terrorism*, *not* civil disobedience. And civil disobedience, like law itself- is habit-forming, and the habit it forms is destructive of the law.

Rightly practiced, civil disobedience has its place. But we have to be very careful how we use it and what we may be unleashing if we do.

There is no moment in all of life in which we must be more diligent to hear and obey the Word of God in Scripture as when we are calling on another person or another group to do the same. We tend to be self-righteous at the best of times. But we are especially self-righteous when we embark on a crusade. At times we must indeed disobey our Government- because Caesar is not God. And although we must render to Caesar what is Caesar's-, we must always be careful to give God what is God's. And may God give us Grace to know the difference.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.