

Suffer for Righteousness Sake/Part 2

Contemporary Conflicts

By Jim Davis

Last month we considered some Biblical examples of godly men disobeying persons who were in authority over them. There are examples in Scripture where prophets or religious leaders confront and call to repentance leaders who are committing sin but we have determined that the only time we should disobey authority is when they require that we sin against God.

The principle stated in Scripture is “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:25). Am I disobedient to a prescribed moral command of the Bible if I obey this command? This is the question to be asked. Here are a couple of examples to consider.

Should we disobey governmental edicts against prayer?

On June 19th of this year a ruling was made by our Supreme Court, in the case Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe. This suit that originated in the state of Texas has determined that oration of Christian prayers over the public address system at home football games is unconstitutional. Long lines of decisions dating back to the 1960s has revealed a very determined and successful attempt to socially and culturally manipulate the United States of America into a post Christian era. A country that determined its national motto would be “in God we trust,” and initially used the Bible as the public school textbook has now interpreted the United States Constitution to read that prayer and the Ten Commandments must not be permitted in our schools. With the present trend that our country is taking and increasing public animosity toward the Christian faith, what are we to do?

Previous decisions by earlier Supreme Courts publicly state a diametrically opposing philosophical view to the court case stated above. Some view the Constitution as an evolving document to be revised according to changing values and standards of society. Others believe that the Constitution should be interpreted according to the original intent of the framers (for information on this subject see www.wallbuilders.com). I believe that our forefathers understood tyranny and the sinful nature of men and devised a wonderful legal document to prohibit any centralized authority from violating matters of religious conscience. When those in office attempt to revise the legal document that they have sworn to uphold in order to impose their political or cultural view on the United States they should be held accountable and removed from office.

I find the document that was signed by King Darius of the Medo-Persians (Daniel 6) was very similar to some of the recent judgments of our Supreme Court. Notice the accusation brought before the king by the commissioners and satraps. “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O King, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day” (Daniel 6:13). Daniel could have hidden himself and prayed privately but made the choice not to do so.

I believe that the time has come when believers should count the cost and determine not to obey governmental injunctions against prayer. Columbine High School was a testimony to our nations faulty and unlawful philosophy that imposes restrictions on prayer and the Ten Commandments. Our children need to pray and be prayed over and they need to learn that

murder is wrong. We are commanded to raise up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and we must not violate that command by bowing to the gods of nihilism and relativism. We must not concede to the presupposition that our children are wards of the state. England's tax on tea was far less tyrannical than our federal government bribing the public with their own tax dollars to embrace a social agenda that is destroying our young people. This is a very serious commitment for all believers but especially for Christian teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. When we consider that the cost of yielding our Biblical principles will mean disobedience to the Lord as well as increased violence and destruction of our children there is no other option.

Should a wife disobey her husband when he demands that she not attend church?

The Bible teaches that wives are to submit to their husbands. They are to adorn themselves with a gentle and quiet spirit and win their husbands without a word by their chaste and respectful behavior (1 Peter 3). But what about circumstances where husbands demand sinful activity? In this case God is a higher authority and His command must take precedent. The writer of Hebrews rebuked those who were forsaking the public gathering of believers (Hebrews 10:25). The context seems to suggest that the problem involved more than church attendance. They were denouncing faith in Christ. The gospels teach that Christ will divide families and that loyalty to Christ is priority over family members (Matthew 10:35-37). Some would suggest that if the requirement does not involve defection or denial that the wife should submit to the husband's request and seek to win him with their gentle spirit. Beware of the spirit of pride, arrogance and rebellion but I believe this is a situation where testimony should be given to Christ's lordship.

Should a young person disobey when his parents oppose his desire to go into Christian ministry?

David was anointed to be king of Israel as a boy. God's will was known in the matter and yet David had to wait many years for this desire to be realized. There were two separate opportunities when David could have taken the life of King Saul and sped up the process but he did not. He was willing to wait for our sovereign God to bring about the events in His own timing. When Joseph was a boy he was given a divine dream (Genesis 37). In his dream he envisioned his older brothers and his parents bowing down before him. That dream was fulfilled but not in the way or in the time that Joseph would have imagined. The Biblical principle is submission to those who are in authority over you. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1). This is true of your parent's heart also. God is sovereign and He is able to change the heart and turn the events. No one can stop His purposes. Learn to wait upon the Lord for his timing and do not try to bring about His plan independently.

Points to consider before taking a stand against authority

Here are some Scriptural principles that you may use to check your response to authority. You will want to consider these principles when conflict arises. They may help you determine that you are truly suffering for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10) and not as an evil doer (1 Peter 4:15-16).

We stand against human authority after we have made certain that there is no personal wickedness involved in our actions. The above verse in 1 Peter says that we

should not suffer as evil doers. That means that we should check our attitudes and correct our actions. We are not suffering for righteousness sake but as an evil doer if conflict arises because of an independent and rebellious spirit. In the Bible we can contrast the difference between David's response to King Saul who persecuted David unjustly (1 Samuel 26:23-24) with Absalom's rebellion against his father and king, David (2 Samuel 15:6). David suffered for righteousness and refused to rebel against the authority of King Saul even though Saul was a madman and a tyrant. We cannot find one instance where David disobeyed his king. The commentary throughout the narrative is that David behaved himself wisely. Absalom on the other hand was quick to rebel against his father. His heart was wicked; his cause was unjust; and his stand was short lived.

We stand against human authority only after we have wisely discerned the areas of personal development that the Lord is seeking to groom into our lives. Joseph suffered unjustly for years before God exalted him to a place of glory and leadership. Sold into slavery by his brothers and later imprisoned, Joseph submitted to the cruel authorities and the unseen plan of God. There is no record of Joseph ever disobeying authority (Genesis 37-50).

We stand against authority only after we have made appropriate appeal to that authority. The prophet Daniel was exiled into Babylon and it is recorded that Daniel took a stand for righteousness with great risk involved. "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). Daniel was righteous in his cause. He had determined to obey God's word regardless of the consequences but he had the wisdom to make appeal to his superior.

We stand against authority only after we have offered a creative alternative. Daniel offered a test for the commander of the officials. He suggested that the food prescribed in the Law of Moses would create better health than eating the king's choice food. By offering a creative alternative he avoided the conflict of disobeying human authority in order to obey God. When we are devoid of selfish and rebellious attitudes it will help our cause and not hinder us. The Lord will often change the heart of those who have charge over us when our attitude is corrected.