

Tuesday, May 5, 2015 - It's Called Disobedience

I have watched, with disgust, the media in this country embracing the heinous actions of various malcontents directed at police who desperately try to conduct their jobs in an increasingly dangerous and unpredictable country. I am not an expert in the actions that either the Ferguson or Baltimore police have taken that resulted in the deaths of human beings. Neither is the media nor the malcontents who feel it is their right to react with violence as a way of showing their "outrage." It is a shame that these actions aren't called what they really are: Civil Disobedience. As with all other subjects, we can turn to the Bible to understand this course of action, with one noted exception, is sin.

A substantial number of Americans seem not to care what the law demands of them. Driving on our highways should convince anyone of that fact. It is not possible to drive on our interstate highways without seeing dozens of drivers who pay little or no attention to the speed limits. Many take the attitude that, "If an activity is not illegal or immoral or fattening, it is no fun." Many individuals violate the law just because they do not like a particular law or because they imagine that it interferes with their freedom and fun? It may not be pleasant to contemplate, but America is a nation of lawbreakers.

The New Testament demands that Christians obey the laws of the land, unless the laws of man conflict with the laws of God. On one occasion, some of the Pharisees sought to trap Jesus by asking, "What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mt. 22:17). They apparently thought they had placed Jesus in an impossible situation. If he approved of paying tribute to Caesar, he would not be a friend of the Jewish nation. If he disapproved of paying tribute to Caesar, he would be in trouble with the Roman Government. Our Lord fully understood what the Pharisees were trying to do. He asked them, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" He asked them to bring him tribute money. When they had brought it to him, he asked, "Whose is the image and the superscription?" They told him it was Caesar's. He then said to them: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:18-21). Jesus certainly did not approve of disobeying civil laws just because we may not like them or because they may cause us some inconvenience or hardships.

Our Lord knew that chaos would reign in civil society without civil government. But he could not approve of those governments, like Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government or Moamar Khadifi's Libyan regime, that oppress and kill their own citizens simply because the citizens disagree with the dictators. However, he did not recommend that the Jews and others rebel against the Roman government, even though the Roman rulers were probably more evil—if possible—than Saddam Hussein or Moamar Khadifi. We must also remember that both Peter and Paul lived and wrote their epistles under the oppressive Roman Empire, yet both apostles demanded that Christians obey the law of the land.

Paul commanded the Romans Christians: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" ("governing authorities" ESV). For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. For he is a minister of God to thee for good" (Rm. 13:1, 4a). Paul urged Titus: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Tit. 3:1). The apostle Peter instructed the early Christians: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance [literally "creation"] of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme: or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Pet. 2:13-14). There is nothing in these passages that limits our obedience to democratic governments. We

are to obey whatever governments are in power, unless they require us to live contrary to the will of God as revealed in the Bible.

Civil law is in place because God allows it. Americans, especially Christians, have a moral obligation to work within the system if at all possible. If those in authority will not listen to our concerns, we have an avenue called the ballot box which allows laws to be changed and tyrannical politicians to be retired. All of this suggests that we must not hide ourselves in some cave. We should take an active part in the affairs of our cities, states and federal government. It is not enough to complain about immoral laws and practices; we should do all within our power to make a difference in our world. How can we be salt and light unless we work to make our world a better place (Mt. 5:13-16)?