

THE CHRISTIAN and CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

(Re: *The Manhattan Declaration: A Call on Christian Conscience*)

Article – *The Washington Times* (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/21/religious-leaders-vow-civil-disobedience/print/>)

A. “Conservative” Christianity – 3 views of understanding Scripture

1. *conservative view* (also called the “high view” of Scripture) – Scripture is God’s revealed, authoritative, written Word; it does not *contain* the Word of God, it *is* the Word of God; view dominated Protestantism after the Reformation (1517-1648)
2. *neo-orthodox view* – sure, Scripture is God’s Word, BUT because the writers were sinful human beings, they were capable of—and actually guilty of—error in their prophecies and writings; still, God speaks through these errors
3. *liberal view* – Scripture is only a record of humans’ searching for God in the normal events of their lives/times; God works in people/societies only through natural—not supernatural—processes (*and still does so today); Scripture contains no truth from God; therefore the Bible is unneeded

B. “civil disobedience” – the non-violent refusal to obey a law or demand thought to be immoral or unjust

C. “Because we honor justice...” – “justice” – cf. Micah 6:8

1. “do” – Heb. *asah* (“aw-SAW”) – “do” or “make”; suggests an ethical obligation, i.e., obedience
2. “justly” – Heb. *mishpat* (“mish-PAWT”) – “justice,” BUT specifically in accordance with the very attributes of God; *mishpat* justice “is rooted in [God’s] character and ought to be emulated by godly people;” it indicates the functions of ALL government branches (not just judicial, but also executive and legislative)

Biblical and Historical Considerations/Examples

A. What does the Bible say about obedience to government? Cf. ...

1. Rom. 13:1-7
2. 1 Pet. 2:13-17
3. Titus 3:1
4. 1 Tim. 2:1-2
- *5. BUT, BUT, BUT... see also Matt. 22:15-22; Mk. 12:13-17; Lk. 20:20-26 → Caesar vs. God!!!

B. What does the Bible say about Christian persecution? Cf. ...

1. Matt. 10:16-22 (cf. Matt. 5:10-12)
2. 1 Pet. 4:12-19

C. Therefore, see the following Biblical examples of civil disobedience → *KEY CONSIDERATIONS: 1) Is it illegal (against proper civil law), immoral (against God’s Word), or harmful? → If so, Christians are not obligated to do it; 2) civil disobedience may be public OR private (although it may become publicized later); 3) in any case, the act is uncompromising, peaceful, and willing to accept the consequences

1. Hebrew midwives (including Jochabed, mother of Moses [and Aaron and Miriam])
 - a. Ex. 1:15 – 2:10; Heb. 11:23
 - b. right to protect and preserve God’s people
2. Israeli soldiers
 - a. 1 Sam. 14:24-30, 43-45
 - b. right to protect the innocent
3. Queen Vashti
 - a. Esth. 1:9-12
 - b. the right to proper personal treatment
4. Mordecai
 - a. Esth. 3:1-15
 - b. right to protect and preserve God’s people
5. Esther
 - a. Esth. 4:1-3, 10-17
 - b. right to protect and preserve God’s people
6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego
 - a. Dan. 3:1-25
 - b. right to religious freedom, to pray, and to worship – against state-sponsored “religion”
7. Daniel
 - a. Dan. 6:1-23

- b. right to religious freedom, to pray, and to worship – against state-sponsored “religion”
- 8. Peter and John and the disciples
 - a. Acts 4:1-22; 5:12-42
 - b. right to preach the gospel and the Truth (capital ‘T’, i.e., JESUS CHRIST!!)
- 9. Paul
 - a. Acts 16:16-24, 35-40
 - b. right to just treatment

D. Other historical examples of civil disobedience

1. John the Baptist – right to expect righteousness in government/government leaders—esp. toward God’s people
2. early Christians – labeled as law breakers; would not bow to Roman emperor or his image
3. Martin Luther – freedom of religion from the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church
4. the American Revolution – freedom from unfair, oppressive taxation and tyrannical government (*NOTE: the colonists’ “rebellion” was initially peaceful; it was only after the British invaded militarily that the colonists then began to fight to defend themselves and their new government)
5. abolitionists and the Underground Railroad – human rights based on racial equality; also, right to protect and preserve God’s people
6. Rosa Parks – human rights based on racial equality
7. Martin Luther King – human rights based on racial equality; right to protect and preserve God’s people

E. Principles of civil disobedience (taken from James A. Fowler) –

1. Our highest authority is God—not human government (even if God did ordain and establish it!)
2. Human government—although ordained and established by God (Rom. 13:1-7)—is still “human-run” and, therefore, capable of sin and great evil
3. Submission to the governing authorities does not mean uncritical obedience
4. Laws, policies, or edicts that are contrary to God’s revealed will are to be disobeyed
5. Disobedience should be non-violent (cf. the bombing of abortion clinics)
6. Those who engage in civil disobedience must be willing to accept the consequences – WHICH MAY NOT ALWAYS BE NEGATIVE!!!

***NOTE:** To sign The Manhattan Declaration, go to <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/>.

References

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