

**Theme:** Nothing But the Truth – Hold Fast to Truth

**Title:** Civil Disobedience – Romans 13:1-7

**Aim:** Consider when it is right to civilly disobey.

**Intro:** American poet/essayist Henry David Thoreau 1<sup>st</sup> coined the phrase “civil disobedience” in 1849, when he wrote the essay entitled “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience.” Wikipedia reports, “Within [this essay, Thoreau] presents the argument that people should not allow governments to supplant their consciences, and that everyone has an important duty to avoid being pawns for injustice.” Civil disobedience is defined (dictionary) as “the refusal to comply with certain laws...as a peaceful form of protest.” From a government website: CD is “A public act that deliberately contravenes a law, that is publicly-performed & that occurs in awareness that an arrest & a penalty are likely.” It has been practiced throughout history. In our country, in recent history (tho over 50 yrs ago), the most well-known figure of civil disobedience has been Dr. Martin Luther King. His civil disobedience eventually cost him his life, but gained civil rights. His namesake, the original Martin Luther stood against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Whittenburg church, 1517. He was excommunicated. Certainly the Boston Tea Party was a form of civil disobedience, one of the events leading up to the Revolutionary War. As we shall see, Peter & all the apostles practiced civil disobedience when they refused to stop preaching the gospel. Theme: Nothing but the truth, w/a sub-theme of “Hold on to Truth,” addressing world-wide issues facing the church today. Obviously, today’s issue is civil disobedience. When is civil disobedience the right thing to do? What does the Bible have to say about civil disobedience? Text: Romans 13:1-7 [READ]. You might find it odd that I chose this text, because it doesn’t say anything about civil disobedience. However, I did so because of what it doesn’t say about civil disobedience. I) **Christians must practice**

**obedience to government authority (or any legitimate authority set in place by God).**

The Roman government, led by the dictatorship of the Emperor Caesars, was in the words of Al Mohler of the Gospel Coalition, “a considerably more hostile” regime than that which we live under today & possibly more hostile than or as hostile as any in history, w/a few possible exceptions. Yet, Paul, who died at the hands of the Romans, executed by the order of Caesar, exhorted the Christians in Rome to “be subject to the governing authorities.” He gave the reason for his exhortation: “For there is no authority except from God...” Even the Roman government had been put in place by God, for His purposes. So, Paul instructs us to not resist authority, because in doing so you are actually resisting God & will incur judgment. Submit to the authority God has set over you. That’s part of submitting to God. Those in government authority, whether they know it or not, are God’s servants, given authority to uphold the law. So, obey the law & be good citizens.

II) **Christians must respect & pray for those in authority over us.** This is an important consideration following an election & facing another in 2 years. ***“Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*** Note what Paul left out of the equation. He didn’t say “like them.” You don’t have to like those who are over you, but you do need to respect them. Yes, as far as we are concerned, respect must be earned – we must endeavor to earn respect. Those in office should also endeavor to earn our respect but whether or not they do, we must give respect to the office. When Paul rebuked the high priest Ananias for ordering him to be struck in the face, he himself was rebuked by those standing there: ***“Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, ‘I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people”’*** (Acts 23:1-5). Yes, he is your president, he/she is

your governor, your senator, your representative, etc. Whether or not you like him/her, respect the office. And pray for those in authority. This same Paul wrote to Timothy (I Tim.2:1-4): ***“1<sup>st</sup> of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, & thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings & all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful & quiet life, godly & dignified in every way. This is good, & it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved & to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** Note that Paul is urging prayer for “those in high positions” for 2 reasons: 1) That the church may “live a peaceful & quiet life, godly & dignified in every way.” In other words, praying for God to bless & guide those in authority over us is designed by God to result in their governing allowing us to live out our faith & carry-on kingdom business w/out government harassment or opposition. 2) That our unhindered, unopposed kingdom work of preaching the gospel will result in disciples being made. God desired that even Gentile Romans, even those in authority “be saved & come to the knowledge of the truth.” Those who are our leaders need Jesus just as much as we do. So pray for those around you, including those who in authority. So what does all this have to do w/civil disobedience? The point is that obedience & submission to governmental authority should be the usual practice of the Christian. We should not easily be given to civil disobedience. And, civil disobedience speaks best & loudest when it comes from one who practices obedience in all matters except when civil disobedience is called for. But when is that? III) **Civil disobedience is called for rarely, but when faced w/the choice between the law of man & what God wants us to do, then disobey the law & obey God.** In the words of Tim Keller, “When commanded to do something that the Bible forbids or forbidden [to do] what the Bible enjoins,” we must disobey. The best example is that of the Apostles. When ordered by the Jewish Council

not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus anymore, Peter & John replied: ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen & heard”*** (Acts 4:19-20). In Acts 5, as the apostles preached the gospel & God worked miracles thru them – healing & deliverance, many embraced Christ by faith & were added to the Church. The high priest & Jewish religious were jealous of their following & arrested them. But an angel of God came during the night & opened the prison doors & told them to ***“Go & stand in the temple & speak to the people all the words of this Life.”*** That’s exactly what they did – the very thing that led to their arrest. When they were found in the temple & brought before the council again, ***“Peter & the apostles answered [their charge], ‘We must obey God rather than man’*** (vs29). Bear in mind, however, that when we disobey government authority, we must be willing to pay the consequences. Peter & John & the rest of the apostles were arrested, they were beaten. All of the apostles except John were martyred for their obedience to the gospel. Paul & Silas were put in stocks in a Philippian jail. Martin Luther was excommunicated & banished. Martin Luther King was arrested & eventually killed. If we purposefully disobey the law of the land because it is counter to God’s word & will, we must be willing to bear the consequences. In that well known account found in Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego had heard Nebuchadnezzar’s command to bow down to his golden image at the sound of the musical instruments. They knew the consequences/penalty of not bowing down to the image. But they refused to bow down because they believed that God alone deserved worship & submission. They were brought before the king & given a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance. But they replied, “We don’t have to think about it nor give you any answer.” ***“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, & He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.***

***But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.***” They were willing to suffer the consequences of their civil disobedience & we too must be so willing. IV) **The bottom line & the aim of our lives should be** (as was stated last week), **“Do all to the glory of God”** (I Cor.10:17). Know Him & make Him known. So again, the rule of thumb should be, obey the law & respect the government. But when faced w/a choice between the law of man & the will/word of God, obey God, no matter what. Hold fast to the truth that God has given us. Build your life upon it. Live your life by it. Let the chips fall where they may. That’s the truth & nothing but the truth.