

A few listeners have requested a pdf of the sermon. I have attempted here to transcribe the sermon as closely as possible with only very minor edits. Quotes from the Bible are taken from the KJV unless otherwise indicated. That morning, following the service, I found the police waiting for me in the lobby. Though I was not fined on that occasion, the timing of the visit struck us all.

This morning I want to face the issue head on; but before I do I want to make a few preliminary comments. So 5 preliminary comments.

1. Number one, there are good men - men that I love and admire - who will not agree with my conclusions. On this I am convinced that they are wrong but my love for them is not diminished in the least. My hope and prayer is that you will all play the part of Bereans, that you will search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. It is sometimes tempting to play favourites, or to go along with the crowd, to be “tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14).” For my part I care about *one* thing: what has God said? What is God’s will? That’s it. What has God said? What does God want?

I don’t like standing alone. In the flesh I like the praise of men as much as anyone else; but if it comes to that I am prepared to do it. I am prepared to stand alone. My conscience is captive to the word of God.

A day is coming when I will stand alone before my Master to give an account for the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10). I will give an account to Him for every word spoken and the words most especially that I have spoken from the pulpit; and it will not matter, then, whether I had this or that man on my side or in my corner, but whether or not I was on His side. That’s all that will matter.

I am somebody who cares deeply about loyalty. It has always been a quality that has always been important to me; but this week I was driving to a prayer meeting and the Lord seemed to be asking me, “where is your loyalty to me?” And I do want to put that question to you this morning. I have come to love this assembly of believers more than I thought possible. It’s a

beautiful thing how the Lord knits people together. I think I can say if it came to it I would be willing to lay down my life for you. But there is One who is many thousands of times more precious to me than any of you. He is that Friend that sticks closer than a brother, He is that One that never fails, He is that One we read of this morning when we read when we said, “Whom have I in heaven but thee and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Him.” And congregation I love Him because He first loved me, and I owe Him everything! *Everything*. And I’ll tell you there are times when everything in my flesh is screaming at me to be quiet, to say nothing. But I must speak. I am constrained not for myself but for Him whom I love.

2.Second, briefly as Bereans you may not all agree with my conclusions. But I would urge you that you take the Scriptures for your rule. I pray God will help you to be blind, utterly blind, to consequences and results, and that you will determine to believe and obey God whatever He asks of you - *whatever* He asks of you.

3.Third, no matter what you decide let us seek to preserve the bond of unity that we have in Jesus Christ. Let us be kind to one another tenderhearted forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Remember that love covers a multitude of sins. So we may not be agreed on every particular, but if the world can get along when they are not agreed on every particular, surely brothers in Christ can get along. We are still brethren, and so let us remember to love one another and pray earnestly for each other.

4. Fourth, my aim this morning is not to present you with an exhaustive treatment of this chapter. That would take a series of sermons. Instead, as simply as I can I want to walk you through the passage, and deal with it as plainly as I can. Then having established some principles we will look at some application.

5. Fifth, I would urge you to remember that Romans 13 is prescriptive rather than descriptive. The apostle Paul as he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was not telling his readers what kind of a king Nero was. Nero was none of these things. You have to remember as is often the case with Scripture, that God is instructing the church, telling us what

ought to be rather than what is. So, this passage (this chapter) is telling us both what kind of magistrates we ought to have and how we ought to respond to such a magistrate.

So, let's then look at the passage together.

You notice that God begins with a clear rule. He says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (Romans 13:1)." To Titus Paul said it like this: "put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates (Titus 3:1)."

Peter said, "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the lords' sake wither it be to the king as supreme or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well (1 Peter 2:13)."

So there you have the opening principle. We are to obey them. That falls under the fifth commandment. So the fifth commandment tells us explicitly that children are to obey their parents; but then, secondarily, they are to obey their teachers (for example), they are to obey their prime minister. But priority is always given to the relationship at home. So you have the priority in the home under the father (the head of the home) but then the secondary application to other authorities, whether the authorities are kings, prime ministers, governors, teachers, etc.

Remember that Jesus said that we are to render unto Caesar what is Caesars (Mark 12:17). And by saying that He was telling us very plainly that there are things that do belong to Caesar. So we may have a Master in heaven, we may have a Father in heaven, but that does not excuse us from obedience to our magistrates. We can't go out then and say, "I'm a child of the King so I can disregard the traffic laws." Actually, as we will see, the apostle Paul reasons from the fact that we are subject to God that therefore - therefore - *because* we are subject to God we have to be subject to our civil leaders.

So far so good, right? Until 2020 there really wasn't much disagreement in the Church on this point. We know in theory that Christians of all men should be model citizens in absolutely every way. And being an ideal, model citizen under God means that we not only obey but we also respect them. We don't make fun of them. And we pray for them.

Paul to Timothy said that we are to pray for kings and for all that are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2).”

Now what I want you to see as we look through Romans 13 is how the apostle Paul moves from the rule, “obey them” to the rationale (the arguments). And there are six.

A. First, he says “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1).” So, the argument here is, God put them there.

You may wonder, why is Justin Trudeau this man that I certainly didn't want to be prime minister and maybe you didn't want to be prime minister how did he get to be prime minister? And we could have a discussion and you could tell me “well its something to do with the democratic process and a lot to do with the fact that people in Quebec liked him and so. But the simple answer to the question is God. God put him there. The same is true in the US. Should Biden become the next president of America you can blame it on a hundred different factors, but the answer is still the same. Its God. God put him there.

B. Second, when you resist the power you are resisting the ordinance of God. Notice how this one is tied in with the first. God put the man there so when you resist him you are resisting God.

C. Third, Paul then goes on and he argues from the nature of their calling. So, you have a calling, and they have a calling. Magistrates, he says, are not a terror to good works but to the evil (Romans 13:3). It's as if he's saying “well, when you disobey them you prove yourself actually to be on the side of evil. They aren't there to punish good, they're there to punish the evil. That's their calling.” Paul's saying, “therefore obey them.” That makes sense right? As

Christians you are already concerned with doing good. It's one of the wonderful things about this miracle of regeneration that before you were bent on doing your own thing and you didn't care what God wanted but now God has done this gracious work in you, so that now the bent of your life is you *want* to do good. So, the apostle Paul says, "listen; you do that and you're going to be fine." They're not there as a terror to good works but to the evil. So, you drive reasonably as you do under the 6th commandment caring for the lives of your family who are in the car and the lives of the people who are on the road around you, you're not going to get a ticket. You seek to preserve life you're not going to drive distracted. You drink in moderation (you refuse to drink in excess) you're not going to get into trouble for drinking and driving. You steal no more but labour working with your hands that which is good so that you have to give to the person who needs (Ephesians 4:28) you're not going to be in trouble with the magistrate.

D. Fourth, Paul goes on and he reasons that if you do good you're going to have praise of the same (Romans 13:3-4). Similar to the previous argument.

What is he saying? He is saying, "if you do good you have nothing to fear." Now remember that as a follower of Jesus Christ you are already pre-eminently concerned with doing good and so Paul says there is no conflict here. You will have no problem doing what the magistrate says. Why won't you have any problem doing what the magistrate says? Because the magistrate is a terror not to good works but to evil. He is a minister of God to thee *for good*.

E. Which brings us to the fifth point. Again, why should we obey the magistrate? Paul says, "because he is a minister of God (Romans 13:4)." Notice the argument. The magistrate is to be obeyed because he is a minister of God. Remember God put him there. The powers that be are of God, they are ordained of God, and therefore the man that is there is a minister of God.

It's like when you resist the authority of the elders. The elders are ministers of God. They are like vice-regents, they are under His authority, and they act for Him; and so to resist them is to resist God. And so it is with the magistrate. Whether its prime minister or president, the mayor,

the MP, whoever it is that has authority. What is he? He is a minister of God. He is God's vice-regent. Therefore, you and I are to obey.

F. Then lastly, Paul adds this: "obey not just for wrath, but also for conscience sake (Romans 13:5)." So, in effect, you are to obey them so as not to mar your conscience.

Do you know that our forefathers said that under God there is no authority higher than the conscience? God says whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23), and if you are a Christian then you know there is nothing in this world so lovely and so cheering as a conscience void of offence before God. Nothing. It's glorious. But you also know that nothing is so miserable as a Christian as a conscience that is spoiled - a guilty conscience. It makes a man utterly miserable. And so our puritan forefathers wisely staked *everything* on the conscience. They actually preferred death over a conscience that was marred. And here is Paul's argument: "obey them for conscience sake! Even your conscience tells you to obey them. So don't sin against your conscience, don't mar your conscience by defying them."

So, there you have in very brief the argument.

But, of course, Paul was writing at a time when believers were being dragged off to prison and death because they refused to say "Caesar is Lord" and because they refused to admit that Jesus was just one of a plurality of gods. They had no problem if you were to say that Jesus was *a god*, as long as you were willing to agree that there were all these other gods as well. They were a pluralistic generation. And, of course, you know that the early believers, many of them were being persecuted, they were being dragged off and killed because they insisted on gathering to worship God and pray. And none of this was a surprise. We don't read in Acts that the early believers or apostles were shocked by it. In fact, if you read the letters the apostle Paul wrote to the churches it's very clear he kept reinforcing the fact this is something you should expect. This is part of being a Christian.

Jesus had said "blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10)." Paul would later say "yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer

persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).” He didn’t say “yea and *some* of you will suffer persecution,” “yea and *many* of you,” but yea *all* that will live godly in Christ Jesus. Now there's a way around it. You don't have to live godly. Then you might get away from persecution. But *all that will live godly* in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution.

You remember that when Peter was urged not to preach in Jesus’ name that he said, “We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).” And of course that followed an earlier episode when Peter and John were instructed not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus and their answer was simply this: “whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye (Acts 4:19).” They took it as self-evident. And then they went out and they disobeyed. And they did exactly what they were told not to do.

And the same Jesus who said, “render unto Caesar what is Caesars” also said “render unto God what is God’s.” Do you remember the occasion? There was a coin and there was a question about paying taxes.

Do you remember what was on that coin? It had on it an image of Caesar. The emperor at the time was Tiberius the son of Augustus and along with the image of the man there were these words on the coin, “Tiberius son of the divine Augustus. Supreme high priest.” So when Jesus taking that same coin said “render unto God what is God’s” he was saying something painfully controversial because he was contradicting the claim made by the emperor himself, and the claim made on that very coin and he was demanding for Himself what the emperor said belonged to him.

It was something like what Jesus would later say to Pilate. Remember Pilate was indignant he was offended because Jesus hadn't shown him the respect he thought he deserved being who he was. Pilate had asked a question and Jesus had simply refused to answer. So Pilate reminded Him of who he was. I want you to listen to what he said to Jesus: “Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You (John 19:10,

NKJV)?” He’s invoking his own authority. And Jesus replied like this: “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11, NKJV). So basically, “Pilate, no you don’t.”

Something should be already patently clear. Absolutely crystal clear. Even as the father’s authority over his own children trumps even that of the king, so our heavenly Father’s authority easily trumps that of any earthly authority. I don’t think anyone here will disagree with that in principle.

But now let’s go back to Romans 13 and consider it in light of this obvious tension; the tension that we’re living in right now. Now again, the answer should be fairly obvious in basic broad brushes. If my son has to choose between obeying me or obeying the prime minister he had better obey me every time. Not just because he has to answer to me but because he has to answer to God. That is the first principle. Start there. But, there is a higher authority. Actually, that’s exactly what Paul is saying in Romans 13! Did you notice that? Do you remember how he reasoned? Do you remember the six reasons he gave why we should obey the magistrate? All six - *all six!* - were tied to our obligations to God. And so, we are to obey the authority, the magistrate, whoever that magistrate is... Why? For God.

Let’s go back over the 6 points and remember this is God’s rationale (God’s reasons) for obedience to the authority.

Number one, they are ordained of God... So, God put them there.

Now suppose I brought in a babysitter for the weekend to look after our children so that ____ and I can get away; and before leaving them I remind them, I say, “listen I have put this person in authority over you, and so you need to be very careful to do whatever your babysitter says. You are to obey the babysitter because I your father have given her authority.”

But now suppose I come home to find out that on one point my children have disobeyed. They have been absolutely exemplary on every other point, but on one point they have disobeyed. On the Sabbath the babysitter, wanting them to get some fresh air, instructed them to go outside and play in the pool; and in many homes that would be no problem, but in our home that is not allowed on the Sabbath. That is a rule that we have established. Now again suppose that on everything else they have freely complied, except on this one point. And why didn't they comply on this one point? Because the babysitter had told them to do something that would violate a longstanding rule that I had given them. The fact that I gave the babysitter authority does not in any way undermine *my* authority. Actually, it's the opposite isn't it? It's *exactly the opposite*. The very fact that I argued from *my* authority and said to my children "you will obey this person because I have handed over authority to them" actually reinforces something. What does it reinforce? It reinforces *my* authority. Do you see that? And so, God says, "I ordained them. You obey them because I have handed them authority." *Whose* authority does that reinforce? It reinforces the authority of God!

Second, a related point. Remember when you resist the power you resist the ordinance of God. But then, what if your resisting the power (the ordinance) because they are telling you you can't do what God has told you you *must* do? So you're resisting the ordinance of God (the power of God) because they are telling you not to do what God has told you you *must* do. Actually, now it is *they* who are resisting God and you who are obeying Him. You don't reason from their being an ordinance of God that therefore their authority trumps God's! It's the opposite - the complete opposite.

Third, what about their calling? Well remember they are a terror not to good works but to evil. Notice the assumption. This is prescriptive, remember, rather than descriptive. If the magistrate becomes a terror to good works rather than to evil, what then? Then the argument no longer holds. You wouldn't say to me, "now listen, you're to obey the magistrate because they are a terror to evil and they are a defender of what is good, *even though* your obeying them will mean that you're not being good but evil." Do you see how illogical sometimes we are? God is saying very clearly to us that the reason we are to obey them is because, on one hand, their

calling is to be a terror to *evil*. And so, if you are doing what is right what have you to fear? Think this through. If you are to obey them because they are a terror to evil than when they become a terror to good they needn't be obeyed. In fact, they must *not* be obeyed.

Do you remember how in Esther's day the Jews were known and despised for following another set of laws? Well, there is the law of the land in which we live; and that law is constantly changing. So there is the law of the land in which we live, and then there is God's law. When Paul says "good" he means one thing. He means good according to God. Good as in the 10 commandments. So, when you are out obeying God, obeying God's law, doing good and by doing good are found breaking the laws of the land in which you live and then you suffer for it do you know what that's called? It's called persecution. It's exactly what Jesus was described when he spoke of the blessedness of being persecuted for what? *Righteousness*' sake!

I have heard men in this generation narrow the field as if it is only persecution when they come after you for speaking about Jesus or for preaching the gospel. Anything else is not persecution. Just that. But Jesus put it much *much* more broadly; and it fits here doesn't it? It fits in perfectly with what Romans 13 says. The argument that Paul is making for your obedience to the magistrate (the leader, the governor) falls apart, it completely falls apart, when the magistrate abandons his calling and becomes instead a terror to good. Then it is not you who are opposing God but the magistrate; unless you do what the magistrate tells you!

Fourth, remember how Paul reasons that if you do good you will also have the praise of the same? So, what then when you do good (what happens when you do good) you don't have praise of the same? Remember, there are times when men call evil good (Isaiah 5:20). They set before us a transgender person and say, "that's good." And Gods says, "it's evil!" They say "this ____ is good," and God says "it's evil." And they say "this _____ is evil," and God says "it's good." So, there are times when things get turned completely on their head, and they do what is right in their own eyes rather than what is right in God's eyes. Remember of course that God's law is unchanging. It never changes. It doesn't change with time. So what Paul is saying, again, does not hold if they come after you for doing good.

So, when in obedience to God you do what they have told you *not* to do and you no longer have their praise but instead have their scorn, what is that? What's happening? Are you then resisting the ordinance of God? No! It's they who are resisting the ordinance of God. Are you then sinning against God because you are doing good? Nonsense! Utter nonsense!!

There is only one way that anyone could ever reach the conclusion that because you are doing good that therefore you are doing bad; [or] that you're sinning because in doing good you're breaking the magistrate's rule. And the only way you could ever reach that conclusion is if Romans 13, first of all, is misunderstood; and then only if Romans 13 trumped everything else in all the Bible. If Romans 13 trumps every other command than, yes, you should obey the magistrate even if that means you don't do good, even if it means you do evil instead of good. But I want to urge you this morning to think. We need to stop simply doing what we're told and start to think. Let's think Christians! Think! That doesn't fit with what Paul writes elsewhere and it certainly doesn't even fit with what we read in Romans 13. He's not saying obedience to the magistrate trumps everything else. He's not saying that. Actually, he is reasoning from the *other* to this; he is reasoning from our prior *greater* obligation to the King of kings down to our obligation to the magistrate. The underlying assumption here is that there is *no* conflict between God and the magistrate. But do you begin to see that if the magistrate comes after you for doing what God has commanded you to do that all 6 points (all 6 arguments) no longer hold any weight whatsoever? Because your greater obligation (Paul has made crystal clear) is to God. You would never obey the magistrate if it weren't for God in the first place. So why would you disobey God for the sake of the magistrate? That would make no sense.

Let's look at the **fifth argument**. Again what is the magistrate? He is a minister of God. So, you are called to obey Him under God. You have the regent and then you have the viceregent. So, here's how it works. You obey the viceregent because of the regent and for the regent. That's what he's saying. That's the argument. But if there is any conflict - and if you're in the military there ought not to be any conflict - but if there happens to be any conflict between the two what do you do? To obey the magistrate in that case would be to turn chapter 13 on its head. It would be a subverting of the whole order which Paul is insisting on. Paul is saying that he is a minister *for God*. For God! *You don't disobey God for God!* That's illogical. Christians

it's silly. And I sometimes wonder.. do you wonder sometimes in this generation if something otherworldly, something almost satanic, has gripped the nations so that we're not even thinking clearly? When Christian leaders tell us that we must stop doing what God has told us to do because the magistrate has asked us nicely they are essentially saying we are to disobey God for God.

And then number six, you are to obey the magistrate for conscience sake. Again, notice the assumption? The assumption is all through the passage. The assumption is that your conscience is demanding obedience. And I know that as your foot pushes on that pedal and the needle begins to rise and you realize you're flying by everybody else on the highway your conscience is going to be pricked. But what do you do when your conscience actually demands something else? Then, obviously, you can't obey them for conscience sake can you? Do you see that? You obey them for conscience sake *assuming* your conscience is telling you to obey them, telling you that what they are asking you is right and good. But if your conscience is telling you what they are asking is not right and not godly and not true then *don't*.

So, here's the order which Paul has given us in this chapter. You have God, conscience, magistrate.

Now Thomas Manton was a presbyterian puritan. He said "our obedience to the magistrate is not to be universal or unlimited." And I'll explain what he meant. It's not to be universal or unlimited.

So, to explain, pay attention to the difference that he was talking about. I am supposed to obey God, as Thomas Manton put it, "upon the bare sight of his will." What does that mean? It means this. It means Adam and Eve in the garden with the tree. No idea why. What's wrong with the fruit? God doesn't say. So whatever God asks I am to do it without question, without hesitation. I don't need to know the reason. I may not understand it, but I am bound to obey. Simply obey Him. You don't owe that to me. You don't owe that to the elders. You do *not* owe that to the magistrate. So, he goes on and says, "I must examine the laws of men,

whether they be just, equal, suiting with charity and public safety; and in many cases active obedience *must* be withheld."

Today (and this is my experience) when men speak of obedience to the governor, to the leader, that they seem to assume that the conscience is obliged to them universally and unlimitedly. In other words, that our conscience is bound to the magistrate in the same way that it is bound to God. So, you don't examine. You don't look at the law and say "okay is this just, is this reasonable, is this true, is this loving?" You just do it. You know that, actually, over the years of church history that's never been the case.

Our forefathers (our Protestants forefathers) never ever saw the magistrate's authority in that kind of light. They knew that while we are *not* to examine the laws of God - in the sense of we are to examine them to understand them, but we are not to be questioning them, we are not to say "okay why, prove it, demonstrate it;" we're just supposed to obey - that when it comes to the laws of men we must, we're bound to examine them. That's our duty.

Brothers and sisters, God never meant for us to simply instinctively give to the magistrate whatever the magistrate asks us. God never meant that. Rather - and we're told this explicitly in the Scriptures - we're to obey him *in the Lord*. Obey in the Lord; which means there must be - there must be - agreement between what the magistrate commands and what God commands. We are to obey for conscience sake, which means that there must be agreement between what the magistrate asks and what the conscience is asking. But when there isn't agreement our duty is very plain. We do not have two masters. We have one. You made that decision when you began as a Christian. When Jesus first said "follow me" you made that decision then and there. Jesus Christ is your Master, and there is no other. We must not - we must not - for no one, for no king, for no power, no authority anywhere *ever* allow our consciences to be marred... ever. Rather die than spoil your conscience.

And so even as you come to the church as Bereans (and I hope you do this; I hope when you come to church you bring your Bible and you do open your Bible and as you're following along as you're listening) you're checking, "is this right?" You're not going to take what I say on blind

obedience because you're not Roman Catholics. You're Protestants. And so you look in the Scriptures. Is it right? Is what he's saying right?

Should I do what he's saying or shouldn't I? *Because my authority is God!* If the minister is a viceregent the regent is King Jesus, and if there is any conflict between the man at the front of the church and King Jesus you'd better obey King Jesus. And if that's true in the Church it's true in the State. So be Bereans. Weigh the laws of the land. They would like for you just to take it and do it. They would like blind obedience. But you're a Christian. You're a citizen of another country. You have another Master, another King; so you examine them and you ask yourself, "is it true, is it right, is it just, is it actually loving?" And that's true, children, in school with your teachers. It's true even in your home. Even in the home! O, your father has greater authority than the prime minister of Canada by far, but even your father is under the authority of God.

And let's consider, then, briefly the application to our current context.

We may be headed into another lockdown which means that we may be told that we're not allowed to gather in groups of more than 10 or more than 5. It may be that if we did that there would be fines. It may come to a time... of course they have the phones, the ability to track the phones now. Who knows, there may come a time when they start randomly or targeting because they begin to hear rumours of churches that are not complying and they begin to call to see if you're home. And the consequence of your disobedience may mean that you have to pay a steep fine, or it may mean that they will charge you with careless endangerment of the lives of others. Then what? Duty is ours, the events are God.

Duty is ours, events are God's.

To allow the possibility of suffering to be a factor in our decision making is to abandon our first principles and to put ourselves ahead of God. And that's not Christian discipleship because Jesus said "if any man will follow me he must take up his cross;" which is to say he is to die. Some of you have already died. You died to sin to the world, and so there's no question, there's no controversy here. You know what to do, you just don't know what it's going to cost

you yet. But the critical question then... and here it is right here: this is the critical, critical question today. *Do we have a duty?* I ask you: do you, and do I have a duty? What is the good?

Now again, because we're Christians we're disciples of the Lord we're going to set aside the possibility of fines, we're going to set aside the possibility of imprisonment, we're going to set aside the possibility that our friends are not going to like us and our neighbours are not going to like us and the governments going to hate and maybe even our family will turn against us. All of that's aside. Because we're Christians.

But what is good? Good is what God defines as good. Good is keeping the commandments. The answer to good is right here. It is the whole of the book of God. You want to know what's good? Read the Bible. Study the Bible. Memorize the Bible. But in simple form, if you want the summary it's God's law. Remember you have the two tables of the law. On the one hand, there is that first table, which has to do with our duty to God. Remember, it's summarized like this, "you shall love the Lord your God." That's number one, the first great commandant. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, mind and soul." And then there's the second table of the law, which is your love for your neighbour. So, what some are saying today - good men sometimes - is that out of deference, out of concern and carefulness and kindness to our neighbour (the person who might get sick or the person who might be offended or for the magistrate who is ordained of God that for them) we ought to temporarily set aside the first table of the law. Now they would say, "wait a minute that's not fair." But let's think. We're called to do this. Think together about the requirements of the first table. God says we are to love Him with all of our being. You ask the question, "how?" "What does it look like to love God with all my heart and all my mind and all my strength?"

And God's answer is quite simple. First of all, you are to worship God. You are to worship Him and you are to worship alone. And, then, number two you are to worship Him only in the way that God prescribes gathering together in the name of Jesus Christ for the reading of the Bible, for prayer, for singing, for preaching. We are to worship *not* how the government commands but how God commands. Now I will just say this in passing. I am thankful it's not been an issue at

all here, but I can't even begin to count how many times God commands us to sing. Its everywhere in the Bible. But I can tell you that there are many Christians even in our own generation who sang aloud in their prison cells even though they were commanded not to and even though when they did sing they were tortured for it. Because.. do you know what a Christian says? "You want to get me to stop singing, you're going to have to remove my tongue." God forbid a day should come when any of our mouths should be stilled from worshipping our King. Well then, third, of course is the great commandment to worship God in the manner that He commands. We're to do this with reverence, we're to do this with awe, we're to do this solemnity, we're to say what God says, we're not to lie. But then fourth, we're to worship God when He commands. We're to gather together on the Sabbath day; and you remember the Sabbath day is given us not for private worship but for corporate worship. And we have a variety of different ages, but however long you have been in the church its always been the way it was. You always understood this. The Sabbath is a day for corporate worship. And the elders don't say to you, "now listen if you feel like it you can just stay at home and have your own worship with your family." You were called to worship. The elders called you in the name of Jesus Christ.

So, God has commanded who we worship, how we worship, the manner of our worship and when we worship. And so, any human law that requires us not to do what God has told us we *must* do is a wicked law that we must disobey. O, it's not an option! I understand that there are those who would say that it's the other side that's erring right now; but I'll tell you that it is on the side of those who have complied with the government that the error lies - that the sin lies. There's great rebellion there. To comply with laws that are explicitly forbidding us from doing what God has commanded us to do is not just a mistake. *It's sin and it's treason against God!* And He's offended by it. It is a rendering unto Caesar what is God's. Now you go ahead and give your taxes to Caesar because that belongs to him. But he cannot, he has no right, to take from God what belongs to God. Not under the pretext that its good for your neighbour anymore than he can forbid you from preaching the gospel to a transgender person because they say its not good for you to preach to them. Do you see the logic in our day? They'll tell you if you preach to the transgender (gay) person that person's going to be all bent out of shape. They

might even kill themselves. It's loving to let them be. Loving to let them do what is right in their own eyes. Are we going to give that over to them as well?

In the 19th century a presbyterian minister found himself in a very awkward situation. Authorities had learned that his town was under imminent threat of attack. He actually doesn't spell out what it was. It was long enough ago that it could have been that there were first nations people that were coming against them. Authorities had learned this anyway and so there was this imminent threat, and so all the citizens were required to help with the fortifications.

Now it was the Sabbath and the magistrate forbade churches from gathering on this particular Sabbath so that they might all help with the fortifications. Well, the minister, a godly man named Edward Payson (now known as praying Payson), with very little comment - he's recording this in a letter - with very little comment almost as if it was the most the most obvious thing in the world records that he and the church gathered twice that day as was their usual custom. They ignored the magistrate even though the magistrate wasn't targeting Christians and even though it was for the good of their neighbours... supposedly. Instead, they submitted to a higher authority and proceeded to do what God had commanded all along (that they should do).

Let me put to you this question, a pointed question that is not theoretical but one that I am sure in time will become very practical. What do you do if the government tells you to stop gathering for worship? "We would like you to go back and do what you did however many months ago. We would like you to stop gathering." What do you do? Christians you gather for worship anyway. What if they tell you to distance from each other? Stay away. Treat each other as unclean just in case some of you are carrying a disease. Well, you greet each other with a holy kiss anyway. And if they persecute you and they fine you and they put you in prison don't be surprised. If you are a Christian remember you already died. You're already a dead man. Gloriously dead, gloriously alive. You already counted the cost. Remember, before you began Jesus had warned you. He'd said "listen if you're going to do this, if you're going to be my disciple, you'd better stop, don't rush into this. Calculate. Think. You know how this works when you go out to build a house. You figure out how much it's going to cost to get the

supplies, the cost of the labourers, and you want to know, “what’s it going to cost me?” “Can I afford it?” Well, did you count the cost? The assumption is, yes, you’ve counted the cost. You’re here this morning. You have already taken up your cross. You knew that as your Master was hated so you, too, would be hated. It was Jesus who said that “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).” So, He’s not saying if you don’t hate your family and you don’t hate even your own life that you’re a lesser disciple, a less godly disciple. He says “you *can’t* be my disciple.” Discipleship looks different than that. Discipleship is to be so utterly given over to Jesus Christ that everyone else - everyone else - is in the distant background.

Now I want to tell you personally speaking that I find it so sad - pitiful really - to see signs on church doors which read “STOP” when they should read “WELCOME”. I find it sad that churches would limit numbers when Jesus never ever turned anyone away, not even you. And it is deeply grievous to me to see the Church allowing Caesar to meddle with what goes on in the courts of King Jesus even allowing Caesar to take from God the worship that He deserves. If anyone told us 5 years ago or 10 years ago this would happen in our day we would never have believed it. And we would have said, “no, no, but if ever it happens it would come right out of the pit of hell.” We have been deceived Church of Christ. The day this church begins to allow Caesar to tell us what we can do and what we can’t do here in the courts of King Jesus that is the day that we should write “Icbahod” on the doors of the church, close the doors, lock the doors and walk away for good.

I heard years ago about an orthodox church, so utterly preoccupied with the holiness of God that when the authorities in the church learned that a gay marriage had taken place in the church they went and the burned the church to the ground. There was something of holy indignation there. Congregation I believe there is something indignant in the heart of God, an anger, a righteous anger and a sorrow at what we have allowed.

So, in closing, what are we going to do?

Well, with God's help we are going to go on doing what we have always done. We will give to Caesar what is his and no more. Not one bit more. And *nothing* and *no one* will stop us from giving to God what belongs to God! We will worship Him here or we will worship Him in secret or we will worship Him in prison. And they may call us mad, they may despise us, they may forsake us, the world may utterly hate us for it and all that will do is prove that we are not above our Master and that it is "given us in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but to suffer for Him." It's a gift of God. And so we will count it all joy! Brothers and sisters *be exceeding glad!* I was thinking this morning of Moses... and he says to God "if you're going to send us over there but you're not going to go then *I don't want to go.*" And it struck me this morning, "O God if you're going to give me my liberty and you're going to leave me outside with all my freedoms intact but you're not going to go with me, *don't give me freedom!!*" I'd rather be in a dungeon with God than in a paradise without Him.

And so what will we do? We will lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees and we will make straight paths for our feet (Hebrews 12:12-13). We will go forth therefore unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach - bearing His reproach - for we have *no* continuing city but we seek one to come (Hebrews 13:13-14).