

WHEN GOVERNMENT VIOLATES GOD

April 11, 2021

I Peter 2:1-25

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” Exodus 20:12

The Ten Commandments are a sequence—each builds successively upon the one preceding—establishing a code of conduct that reveres God and ensures personal and societal prosperity. Such reverence for God, set forth in commandments 1-4, is the foundation for civil relations with our fellow-men. Upon this, commandment five prescribes honor toward human authority, which is necessary to ensure productive civility, security and societal stability.

“Father” and “mother” include all who hold authority over us: teachers, supervisors, rulers and governments. Scripture teaches this uniformly: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Mark 12:17). “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God” (Romans 13:1, 2). “Submit yourselves to every ordinance 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” (I Peter 2:13-14).

But questions arise. Are we to submit to rulers whose wickedness includes hostilities to Christ and to His Word, such as we face in this land today? Must we submit in matters where submission implies affirmation of their anti-Christ worldview? What are we to do when authorities send mixed signals with contradictory or confusing demands?

We may forget that our governments—state, local and federal—are a rare exception to the pattern of history. Commands of Scripture were first given to people ruled by pagan tyrants; power-drunk dictators who feared neither God nor man. To these, God's people were instructed to be submissive, to render honor, respect and obedience. The same is true today.

The concept of government by the people and for the people did not take hold until the Protestant Reformation resurrected the biblical teaching of individual liberty. From this came governments that enshrined liberty for the common man. Therefrom arose, with God's blessing, the greatest productivity, prosperity, comfort and convenience ever known to mankind. These blessings include governments whose policies can be influenced and changed, by the “commoners.” We should not take that privilege or that responsibility lightly. It is God-given.

We face government actions today that are conspicuous violations of God's Word. For example, the government in power seems wholly committed compelling everyone to approve and support a view of sexuality that is abhorrent to Scripture. And the abortion atrocity continues with governmental approval. On such issues, we cannot budge. These are abominations unto God, and we must not silently acquiesce or equivocate to their blazing presence in our society.

Other issues are not matters on which Scripture has spoken, but matters of personal preference on which we may differ strongly with the government requirement. How must we respond when our government demands face masks, vaccinations, social distancing, and much related to the current pandemic. On these, we need much wisdom.

Under our governments, laws cannot be made, as they appear to have been recently, by the whim of elected and appointed officials, based upon the frequently changing opinions of “experts.” Laws must be made by constitutionally established legislative and administrative processes. When they are not established through constitutionally prescribed means, must they be obeyed?

Ultimately, courts determine whether rulers have transgressed the limited authorities granted to them by the Constitution. Like it or not, it is the courts that determine what the Constitution says. We must make this choice: either obey, or refuse to obey and let the courts rule on whether our “disobedience” is indeed disobedience, or is a proper resistance to authorities who overstepped their bounds. If courts determine that rulers’ actions are legitimate, we must submit to the consequences of our action. Throughout the process, our Christian testimony must be prayerfully maintained with “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (I Peter 3:4), as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (I Peter 2:16).

1. We must be characterized by OBEDIENCE. We must receive every ruling of our authorities in the spirit of submission, desiring to obey: “the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God” (Romans 13:1, 2). When those order transgress the Scriptures, we must refuse to obey. But our first impulse must be a willingness to conform, if we can do so without violating God’s Word.

2. If government compels us to violate biblical truth, we must HUMBLY AND RESPECTFULLY REFUSE TO OBEY, AND SUBMIT TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSAL. We cannot:

Forsake our assembling together to worship

Bow to any other god, whether it is an image, an idea, a value-system, etc., etc.

Affirm that which is forbidden in Scripture

Violate a biblically informed conscience

Regarding government orders unrelated to Scripture, that we believe transgress our Constitution, we must either obey, or refuse to obey and await a judicial ruling that government has indeed transgressed the Constitution. Throughout that wait, humble submission to government authority (not necessarily its rules) is biblical. If the court’s ruling is unfavorable to our views, we must humbly submit to whatever the consequence may be.

3. IN EVERYTHING, WE MUST MAKE OUR CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY THE HIGHEST PRIORITY, FOR CHRIST’S HONOR. We are “strangers and pilgrims” in this world (I Peter 2:11). We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. We submit, “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (I Peter 2:15).

4. REMEMBER HOW CHRIST DEALT WITH A TYRANNICAL, UNJUST GOVERNMENT.

A pagan empire and its careless ruler crucified Christ. Never will there be a greater crime or miscarriage of injustice. Amid this circumstance, Christ declared, “No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).