

How Should We Then Live The Church in a Pagan Nation

Titus 3: 1-2

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

Introduction:

The Commonwealth of Kentucky is now the setting for a dramatic display of judicial arrogance, even as the larger story points to the sweeping moral change that is transforming the nation's landscape. Today, U.S. District Judge David Bunning ordered Kim Davis, County Clerk of Rowan County, to go to jail for refusing to obey an order of his court requiring Mrs. Davis to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Actually, Mrs. Davis has refused to issue *any* marriage licenses since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its *Obergefell* decision legalizing same-sex marriage back in June. She stated that her Christian convictions would not allow her to issue a license for a marriage she did not

believe was legitimate. Over the last several weeks, the County Clerk found herself summoned before judges, including the judge who sent her to jail. She had appealed her cause to the U.S. Supreme Court, which denied her request for a stay of the District Court's order.

In court today, Judge Bunning told Davis: "The court cannot condone the willful disobedience of its lawfully issued order." He continued by arguing that "if you give people the opportunity to choose which orders they follow, that's what potentially causes problems."

Well, Judge Bunning has now caused a real problem of his own. With lesser sanctions at his disposal, he sent a county clerk to jail and put her right in the center of the nation's attention. He explained that he did not think that fines alone would change her mind. Does he really think that sitting in jail is more likely to convince her?

As Mrs. Davis and her attorneys have made clear, she has been willing for her name to be removed from marriage licenses in Rowan County, but she is not willing to put her name on those licenses so long as that would require her approval of same-sex marriages. But Judge Bunning made clear that he would be satisfied only when Mrs. Davis either issues marriage licenses in compliance with the *Obergefell* decision or resigns her office.

Kim Davis surrendered to the U.S. Marshall Service after Judge Bunning handed down his order.

Furthermore, though the most pressing challenges in this case are centered in a political office, the same pressures and demands for moral coercion are found in higher education, in the world of business, and even among the Boy Scouts. There is virtually no Christian who will not face these questions at some point, in some way.

The Bible is clear — a Christian cannot act in violation of conscience without committing sin. Kim Davis has been clear, even as her own marital background has been discussed, that her conversion and Christian beliefs do not allow her to sanction what the Bible declares to be sin.

At the same time, the Christian church has long struggled to understand how Christian faithfulness is translated into faithful decisions in any number of political and legal situations. How would a faithful congregation advise Mrs. Davis to fulfill her Christian commitment? Should she remain in office and refuse to issue marriage licenses? Should she resign her office? Exhausting appeals to a higher court, should she now obey Judge Bunning's order? Should she defy that order and go to jail?

(Al Mohler blog)

In an increasingly secular and ungodly culture, many Christians wonder about their role and duty. Should we lobby for rights that

have traditionally belonged to us? Should we make every effort to implement a Christian agenda? Should we completely reform the government? The Bible speaks clearly about our duty, and it's all about governing our character.

Over a quarter of a century ago the late apologist and Christian thinker Francis Schaeffer asked the question, "How should we then live?" in his landmark book of the same title. The relevance of that question has not changed. If anything, it has only become more urgent for believers at the dawn of a new century and millennium.

Society has taken a nosedive into greater and greater evil, debauchery, violence, and corruption, and outside the church, the landscape seems filled with "modern barbarians." The temptation is strong for believers to jump into the cultural fray as self-righteous social/political reformers and condescending moralizers. All the while those self-styled Christian activists forget or ignore their true mission in the **world** and completely miss the answer to Schaeffer's question—an answer that God's Word spells out quite clearly.

As noble as a desire to reform society may be, and as stirring as the emotions sometimes are when involved in the "rightness" of a political cause, those activities are not to be the Christian's chief priorities. God does not call the **church** to influence the culture by promoting legislation and court rulings that advance a Scripture point of view. Nor does He condone any type of radical activism that would avoid tax obligations, disobey or seek removal of government officials we don't agree with, or spend an inordinate amount of time campaigning for a so-called Christian slate of candidates.

The **church** will really change society for the better only when individual believers make their chief concern their own spiritual maturity, which means living in a way that honors God's commands and glorifies His name. Such a concern inherently includes a firm grasp on Scripture and an understanding that its primary mandate to us is to know Christ and proclaim His gospel. A godly attitude coupled with godly living makes the saving

message of the gospel credible to the unsaved. If we claim to be saved but still convey proud, unloving attitudes toward the lost, our preaching and teaching—no matter how doctrinally orthodox or politically savvy and persuasive—will be ignored or rejected. The New Testament is very clear about how we ought to embrace and live out our primary mission in a **pagan** society. One such example is in Titus 3:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

(Titus 3:1-2)

Notice that Paul simply followed the Lord's model and did not expend time and energy admonishing believers on how to reform **pagan** culture's idolatrous, immoral, and corrupt practices. The apostle also did not call for believers to exercise civil disobedience to protest the Roman Empire's unjust laws or cruel punishments. Instead, his appeal was for Christians to proclaim the gospel and live lives that would give clear evidence of its transforming power.

Believe it or not, Christians have obligations to a **pagan** society. When you live as God wants you to in an unbelieving culture, the Holy Spirit uses your life to draw the sinner by softening his attitude toward God (cf. 1 Peter 2:12).

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

1 Submission and Obedience

**Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities,
to obey**

1st We must understand its Context
Titus 2:11

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

3:3

³ For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

⁸ This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

to be subject

hupotassó: to place or rank under, to subject, mid. to obey

Original Word: ὑΠΟΤΆΣΣΩ

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: hupotassó

Phonetic Spelling: (hoop-ot-as'-so)

Short Definition: I place under, subject to

Definition: I place under, subject to; mid, pass: I submit, put myself into subjection.

HELPS Word-studies

5293 *hypotássō* (from **5259** /*hypó*, "under" and **5021** /*tássō*, "arrange") – properly, "*under God's arrangement,*" i.e. *submitting to the Lord* (His plan).

to obey

peitharcheó: to obey authority

Original Word: ΠΕΙΘΑΡΧΕΩ

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: peitharcheó

Phonetic Spelling: (pi-tharkh-eh'-o)

Short Definition: I obey one in authority

Definition: I obey one in authority, conform to advice, obey, follow.

HELPS Word-studies

3980 *peitharxéō* (from **3982** /*peíthō*, "persuade" and **746**/*arxē*, "what comes first") – properly, *persuaded of what must come first*, i.e. what has *priority* (the higher authority).

The first two duties—submission to government and obedience to all human authority—I've combined under one heading because they are so closely related. They are just one more reminder that Christians have certain requirements of attitude and conduct in relation to their secular leaders. Those reminders reiterate the idea that believers are not exempt from following civil laws and directives,

That twofold prompting also gives us the scriptural premise from which all our other public actions ought to flow.

Romans 13

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

I Peter 2:11-17

¹¹ Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

¹³ Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. ¹⁷ Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

unless such orders contradict the Word and will of God

Matt 22:15

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. ¹⁶ And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.

¹⁷ Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show Me the tax money.”

So they brought Him a denarius.

²⁰ And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription *is* this?”

²¹ They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” ²² When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Acts 4:16-20

¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”

¹⁸ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Acts 5:27

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸ saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you

have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

²⁹ But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:40-42

⁴⁰ And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

Daniel 3:12

¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "*Is it true*, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *that* you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast

immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

Al Mohler states

“Kim Davis was within her rights as a citizen of the United States and as an official who had pledged to uphold the U.S. Constitution to appeal her case and make her argument all the way to the Supreme Court. The hardest questions come now that her appeal was turned back.

The Bible clearly commands that Christians respect the rightful authority of civil governments, understanding that the institution of human government is itself a part of God’s design. At the same time, the rightful power of government is not absolute. The Apostle Paul tells us to obey the government but Daniel and his friends were right to refuse to bow the knee to King Nebuchadnezzar. When is the Christian to obey and when must the Christian *not* obey government?

It is very revealing that many of those who are celebrating Judge Bunning's decision to send Kim Davis to jail and who are now asserting their absolute commitment to the rule of law are the very same people who made the opposite argument when it served their purposes. That argument, taken at face value, would have meant no civil rights movement — and no gay rights movement. Furthermore, it would have meant no American Revolution. If the Christian responsibility to obey government is extended without the support of other Christian duties, all that is left is tyranny and obeisance to the state.

The Apostles Peter and John told the Sanhedrin, “We must obey God rather than men” [Acts 5:29]. Martin Luther testified before the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire as he was on trial for his life: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe, God help me.”

During the Reformation, both Martin Luther and John Calvin affirmed what was later defined as the “doctrine of lesser magistrates” which held that the tyrannical dictates of a higher authority could be defied by a lesser government authority who acted on conscience in defense of what is right. Lutheranism even added this doctrine to its confessional basis in the Magdeburg Confession (1550). Many Anabaptists went even further,

arguing that no Christian could faithfully hold government office.

There is no easy way out of these questions. Add democratic self-government to the mix and the questions only get more difficult and perplexing.”

2 Readiness for Good Works

v1 to be ready for every good work,

Our third major duty toward society is to have a readiness "for every good deed." Here the apostle Paul is not referring to some minimal, reluctant adherence to doing what we already know is right, but to a sincere willingness and heart preparation to do good works to everyone, as we have the opportunity. No matter

how antagonistic the people around us may be, we are to be kind servants to them when their lives intersect with ours.

"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10).

God wants us to be recognized for what we might call "consistent and aggressive goodness"—good deeds done out of love for the Lord and love for other people.

3 Respectful in Speech

v² to speak evil of no one,

Next, we have the scriptural duty of not maligning anyone, not even those unbelievers who are most antagonistic toward biblical standards.

Titus 3:2 begins with Paul's command "to malign no one," and refers to cursing, slandering, and treating with contempt. In fact the Greek term rendered "malign" is the one from which we derive the English word *blasphemy*. We can never use such speech with a righteous motive.

It is sad that many believers today speak scornfully of politicians and other public figures. When they do that, they actually manifest a basic disregard of their responsibility toward authority and hinder God's redemptive plan. In another of Paul's pastoral

letters, he urges us to pray for everyone's salvation, even for that of those who occupy official positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

4 Peaceful and Gentle

v2 to be peaceable, gentle,

Paul goes on in verse 2 to mention two more Christian duties. First, he reminds us that we must be friendly and peaceful toward the lost, not belligerent and quarrelsome. In the ungodly, postmodern **world** we live in, it's easy to condemn those who contribute to the culture's demise and write them off as corrupt sinners who will never change. If God's love for the **world** was so broad and intense that His Son died for a multitude of sinners (**John 3:16**), how can we who have received that redeeming grace be harsh and unloving toward those who have not yet received it? Until God is pleased to save an individual, he or she is going to behave like an unbeliever, and it is wrong for us, meanwhile, to treat them contemptuously for acting according to their nature.

Secondly, Paul reminds us that we must be "gentle," a word in the Greek that means being fair, moderate, and forbearing toward others. Some have translated this term "sweet reasonableness," a definition denoting an attitude that does not hold grudges but gives others the benefit of the doubt.

5 Consideration for Others

v2 showing all humility to all men.

The final duty in the apostle Paul's list of reminders to believers is that they should be "showing every consideration for all men" (**1 Timothy 2:2**). The word rendered "consideration" always has a New Testament meaning of genuine concern for others. Scripture clearly describes Jesus as the One supremely characterized by humility, or consideration for everyone—the same trait that should identify His followers. Jesus used the word to depict Himself when He told His followers, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am *gentle* and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (**Matthew 11:29**, emphasis added).

All our dealings with unbelievers should display that kind of attitude, as the apostle Peter also wrote: "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (**1 Peter 3:15**). Sincere, heartfelt consideration to all men is foundational for our Christian walk in a **pagan** society.

Our duty as we relate to an increasingly secular and ungodly culture is not to lobby for certain rights, the implementation of a Christian agenda, or the reformation of the government. Rather, God would have us continually to remember Paul's instructions to Titus and live them out as we seek to demonstrate His power and grace that can regenerate sinners. Changing people's hearts one individual at a time is the only way to bring meaningful, lasting change to our communities, our nation, and even the whole world.

(Adapted from a gty.org blog on Church in a pagan world)