

Are There Limits to Obedience?

The government must be obeyed (Rom. 13:1,2). But what must Christians do when the laws of the land clash with the laws of God? Must they obey the government at all cost? Are there no limits to obedience? The sphere of the state has limitations. John Murray, in his study of The Relation of Church and State, says that the sphere of the civil government "is that of guarding, maintaining, and promoting justice, order, and peace." On the other hand, "To the church is committed the task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God and, therefore, the counsel of God as it bears upon the responsibility of all persons and institutions... When the civil magistrate trespasses the limits of his authority, it is incumbent upon the church to expose and condemn such a violation of his authority." God has given the church and the state each its own sphere of responsibility. The state may not suppress the conscience of its citizens. Christians may not allow themselves to be forced to act against their faith. Their first allegiance is God. Paul writes, "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). For example, the government has no right in the name of political correctness to dictate what the church should preach. Hands off the church!

To preach the Gospel is our Lord's great commission to the church (Matt. 28:19-20), And the Gospel message embraces this life and the life to come. When the authorities in Jerusalem commanded Peter and the apostles not to preach the Gospel anymore, they replied, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 4:29). The church may never cease to preach the whole counsel of God even though the government may try to stop it. And no government has the right to command Christians to perform immoral acts or to silence their protest against evil. In 1939 Hitler began his euthanasia project. The Protestant protest was mealy-mouthed. The Catholic hierarchy vigorously condemned it. On August 3, 1941, the Bishop of Munster, Graf Von Galen, in a blistering sermon, called euthanasia "plain murder." Three weeks later it was all over. The protests had proved to be effective. The Czech J. Stern notes that if the German Churches had opposed the persecution of the Jews as they had opposed the killing of the insane and sick, there would have been no "Final Solution." But whether this is so, we will never know.

Christians must refuse to participate in any activity which, conflicts with God's law. Though it may prove to be costly, they must speak out against racism, anti-semitism, euthanasia, abortion and the constant undermining of the family.

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