



Civil Disobedience: When Does It Become Necessary

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Explanatory Note

Each of our three successive statements regarding civil disobedience have been combined in this one file. The first statement, "When Does It Become Necessary," was published on November 11th, 2020. It was followed by, "It's Starting To Become Necessary," on November 26, 2020. These two were not that far apart on account of the ongoing changes regarding desocialization mandates. Having successfully bridged from outdoor church to indoor church, our new state "orders" called for no singing indoors. We could not comply. Our third statement, "What If Two Good Outcomes Are In Competition," came several months later on August 20th, 2021, upon new government orders due to a "resurgence" in the viral pandemic. We were being told to shut down again for the sake of physical safety. This, however, forced us to consider the mental, emotional, and spiritual safety issues in light of the previous shutdown. After attempting, in good faith, to be a part of the solution against the pandemic, we knew we had witnessed internal harm within too many families. Could we allow for more harm in the social arena for another defensive effort in the physical arena? Our answer was "No."

Each of the three sections in this document address the same issue: reject the mandates or not. However, each one brings specific nuances to the discussion regarding civil disobedience.

Civil Disobedience: When Does It Become Necessary?

Sometimes, within the Lord's Church, faithful followers disagree. In fact, there are times when folks in the Body of Christ, who genuinely enjoy solid, wonderful, fellowship, disagree. On matters of prime importance--the essentials* of our faith--these folks stand with complete agenda harmony. However, on some things, not of prime importance, they choose to disagree with understanding, love, and compassion. This does not hurt their fellowship. In fact, if they are careful, their fellowship grows, their depth expands, their resolve tempers, their commitment strengthens. We find ourselves in such times. We are faced with a particular issue in which believers do not always agree. Here it is: do we follow our government's directions on safety protocols regarding Covid 19? At West Sound Community Church, we have chosen to do so. What follows is why.

First, we must hasten to say we will not cover all the biblical issues wrapped up in this decision. A complete analysis would include exposition on several topics. These might best be quickly mentioned via several questions:

Am I my brother's keeper?

Am I to be a Good Samaritan?

Am I to make sacrifices on behalf of others?

Am I to submit my liberty to the preeminence of love?

Do the words of Jesus still apply: *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends?"*

Do the words of Jesus still apply: *"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?"*

Do the words of Jesus still apply: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself?"*

Do the words of Jesus still apply: *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you?"*

The answers are yes...and they are quite significant within the Church's current conversation concerning whether or not to follow community guidelines about social distancing. After all, no matter if we agree or disagree, as Christ followers we must always consider the Love Factor...how do we best demonstrate God's love to a world that does not know him? If time permitted, it would be both pleasing and profitable to tackle each of the above questions to see how each of them enhances our best practices for the topic at hand. However, time does not permit. Instead, like churches across the globe, we must tackle the big one: to mask or not to mask, to distance or not to distance, these are the questions. In other words, in order to Glorify God through The Great Commission is it time to engage in civil disobedience? Let's see...

Most folks who know their Bibles realize God's Word addresses "civil disobedience" head on. In fact, there are some primary passages that must be understood with any discussion in which we participate concerning this form of interaction between us and appointed authorities. These passages fall into two camps: those that clearly teach us to obey our ruling authorities and those that clearly teach us that on some occasions we must disobey our ruling authorities.

First, there are those that teach us to obey our ruling authorities. Three of them are primary in this study. Take your time. Read them several times. Also, read them within their contexts. They are quite straight forward and accessible.

1. Romans 13:1-7

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very

thing. 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."

2. 1 Peter 2:11-17

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

3. Titus 3:1-11

"Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

There you go...obey the authorities who have been appointed over you. It's not up for debate. The passages are clear and precise. All things being equal, this obedience is ultimately...

- ...obedience to God
- ...good for society
- ...a means of influencing the appointed authorities
- ...a means of preventing slander against us
- ...a means of glorifying God
- ...accomplishing the will of God to silence the ignorance of foolish people
- ...shows perfect courtesy toward all people
- ...way, way different from the ways of our unbelieving past.

Second, there are other passages that teach us that on some occasions we must disobey our ruling authorities. These also should be read over and over, as well as within their contexts. On the whole, it's a bit lengthy, but it's God's word. There's nothing better. So be careful with it. Read it well. Then we will unpack it a little.

1. Exodus 1:8-22

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. Then the king of

Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and let the male children live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.'



Modified from New Born Baby On An Arm by Vera Kratochvil (shorturl.at/TCL78)

2. 1 Samuel 14:24-46

And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great." They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint. The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood. Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD. Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." Therefore Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die." And Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan." Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

3. 1 Kings 18:1-19

After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals." So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself. And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an

oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here."' And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"; and he will kill me.' And Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today." So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

4. Daniel 3:1-30

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and 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." Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and

*Look! I see four men
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son of the gods!*

Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

5. Daniel 6:1-28

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit



Modified from Daniel's Answer to the King by Briton Riviere in 1890 (Manchester Art Gallery).

was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times

a day." Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed." Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions." So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

6. Acts 4:1-22

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "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 and heard." And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.



Modified from Saint Peter Preaching In Jerusalem by Charles Poëerson in 1642 (L.A. County Museum of Art).

7. Acts 5:17-29

But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest

came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

8. Revelation 13:

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Regular readers of the Word of God realize these passages set limits upon the passages that teach us to obey our authorities. So then, what are these limits? Are they broad and sweeping? Are they confined to certain situations? Can they be summarized? Well, for our purposes here, hopefully they can be articulated briefly. These limits might be referred to as a caveat to Romans 13, 1 Peter 2, and Titus 3...or perhaps a stipulation, a caution. It's this: we should obey authorities unless they tell us to disobey or disavow God.

A quick summary of each of these passages shows what we mean...

- Exodus 1: Hebrew midwives were told by the Egyptian Pharaoh to murder all the male babies, *"but the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live."*
- 1 Samuel 14: After making a stupid command and after his son unknowingly broke the command, King Saul ordered the death of his son, but *"then the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.' So, the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die."*
- 1 Kings 18: During this time God's people suffered at the hands of a wicked queen who brutally wielded her authority. She even attempted to eliminate all the Prophets of God. Fortunately, for some of the prophets, Obadiah, who *"feared the Lord greatly,"* secretly hid and cared for 100 of them.
- Daniel 3: While in exile, the people of God were told to worship the gods and the idol of King Nebuchadnezzar, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not, so the king sentenced them to die in a furnace. The three men, *"answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and 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.'"*
- Daniel 6: While also in exile, Daniel, a faithful servant of God, had found favor in the sight of the foreign king. Other officials hated this. Therefore, they created a ruse designed to bring an end to Daniel. Playing on the king's ego, the other officials motivated him to pass a decree that for 30 days no pleas or petitions could be made to anyone other than the king. Naturally, Daniel could not obey such a command. So, he continued to bow only before God in prayer and supplication.
- Acts 4 and 5: In the early days of the church, the apostles were twice told by the authorities they could not speak or teach in the name of Jesus, to which they responded the first time, *"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 and heard,"* and on the second occasion, they said, *"We must obey God rather than men."*

● Revelation 13: During the future days of the Antichrist's manipulations, all mankind will be told to worship the evil of his horrid presence. Some will disobey...and we are told in verse 15 *"those who would not worship the image of the beast"* were slain.

These "civil disobedience" events have some things in common. Let's quickly review again...

- The midwives under the Egyptian Pharaoh were told to kill babies. They refused.
- The people under King Saul were repulsed by his decree that Jonathan must die. They refused.
- Obadiah could not stand by as the prophets were killed. He rescued 100 of them.
- The people of God were told to worship the gods and idol of King Nebuchadnezzar. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused.
- Daniel, along with everyone else, was told to make no plea or petition to anyone other than the king. He refused.
- The apostles were told they could not speak or teach in the name of Jesus. They refused.
- During the end times, folks will be told to worship The Beast. Some will refuse.

There is a simple pattern here.

Folks were told to violate God's truths.

Folks were told to murder.

Folks were told to worship someone or something other than God.

Folks were told to not speak or teach on behalf of the Lord.

This then might be called the Romans 13 Caveat: "When told to violate the word of god, to commit evil, to worship another, or to shut up about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we must refuse."

Some believe the "stay at home, wearing of masks, social distance guidelines, and the remain closed" orders are an overreach of government when it comes to churches. We do not...not yet.

Yes, civil disobedience is always an option. In fact, it is likely we will, one and all, find ourselves choosing this option should current events continue to devolve. In fact, individual believers have and are currently doing so on many fronts.

Churches will, more and more, be faced with this probability due to any number of issues that threaten our ability to stay true...morality issues, pro-life issues, gender fluidity issues, marriage issues, sexuality issues, and free speech issues to name a few. A member of our church had to leave her teaching post, because she could no longer teach what was being asked of her. On several occasions, when asked to pray or speak in public, our pastor has been asked not to mention the Savior. When circumstances like these arise, we must be prepared in advance to refuse. There is nothing new here. However (and here our "However" walks carefully with respect and admiration for those with whom we disagree), we do not believe we have reached the threshold of the Romans 13 Caveat. Specifically, we do not believe community standards, in response to the viral pandemic, regulating where we worship reaches the threshold of what we find in the biblical instances of civil disobedience. Yes, we are being told to alter the where and how of what we do, but we've not been told to violate God's truths, commit or support acts of evil, worship someone or something other than God, or not speak or teach on behalf of the Lord. Not yet.

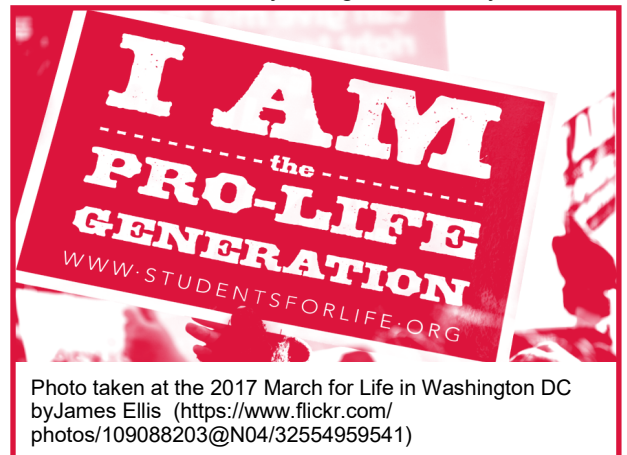
Not yet.

So far as we know, across the land, though we are being told to modify our forms, the function of our mission is not suspended.

We can still meet in the name of the Lord.

We can still sing in the name of the Lord.

We can still speak and teach in the name of the Lord.



We can still be Good Samaritans in the name of the Lord.

We can still do the work of evangelism in the name of the Lord.

We can still pray in the name of the Lord.

For followers of Jesus this is not a minor disagreement. It has consequences...on both sides. With humility, we submit it for your consideration. In conclusion, we invite you to dialogue and prayer. These are unparalleled and perilous times. The Body of Christ must distinguish itself correctly. It must not, it cannot descend into a shouting match...

...one side slamming the other with accusations of cowardice..."Why are some of my 'so called fellow Christians' cowardly and fearful of standing up to the government?"

...the other side counter-slaming with accusations of conspiracy..."Why are some of my 'so called fellow Christians' involving themselves with conspiracy thinking."

In fact, if we lead foremost by abiding in the Lord and his word, rather than by our civil liberties, then and only then will we be prepared to discuss or write about these matters. As well, if we are prepared to discuss these matters with humility and gentleness, then we can represent our Savior well. At every point along the way, West Sound Community Church and other churches need to agree on the essentials, but we do not have to agree on non-essentials.

"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings."

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

*Essentials: the core of Christian belief, the necessary truths of and for salvation. Examples: the Trinity, the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, Salvation by faith through grace alone, the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible...



Civil Disobedience Part Two: It's
Starting to Become Necessary

Civil Disobedience: Part Two

It's Starting to Become Necessary

In our last post, "Civil Disobedience: When Does It Become Necessary," we made a clear biblical point...while civil disobedience must always be an option for a Christian, a local church, or the Church, it must be engaged only under certain conditions.

We also forecasted the very real possibility that the tipping point might very well be reached in the future. However, we had not yet crossed the threshold. After a lengthy study of the pertinent passages in Scripture, we wrote the following regarding when it is appropriate to not follow the dictates of a ruling body:

"There is a simple pattern here.

Folks were told to violate God's truths.

Folks were told to murder.

Folks were told to worship someone or something other than God.

Folks were told to not speak or teach on behalf of the Lord.

This then might be called the Romans 13 Caveat: 'When told to violate the word of God, to commit evil, to worship another, or to shut up about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we must refuse.'

Some believe the 'stay at home, wearing of masks, social distance guidelines, and the remain closed' orders are an overreach of government when it comes to churches. We do not...not yet. Yes, civil disobedience is always an option. In fact, it is likely we will, one and all, find ourselves choosing this option should current events continue to devolve."

A few sentences later, we wrote:

"Specifically, we do not believe community standards, in response to the viral pandemic, regulating where we worship reaches the threshold of what we find in the biblical instances of civil disobedience. Yes, we are being told to alter the where and how of what we do, but we've not been told to violate God's truths, commit or support acts of evil, worship someone or something other than God, or not speak or teach on behalf of the Lord. Not yet. Not yet."

One of those "Not yet" issues has arrived. We have now been instructed that we cannot sing during our worship services. This is a problem...because it violates clear instruction in the Word of God. How so? Well, let's take a look.

Under the Governor's New Order (see it [here](#)), guideline #12 states:

" Religious Services are limited to 25 percent of indoor occupancy limits, or no more than 200 people, whichever is fewer. Congregation members/attendees must wear facial coverings at all times and **congregation singing is prohibited**. No choir, band, or ensemble shall perform during the service. Vocal or instrumental soloists are permitted to perform, and vocal soloists may have a single accompanist. Outdoor services must follow the Outdoor Dining Guidance, found [here](#), applicable to the structure or facility." (bold, italics, and underline added)

This instruction forces us to consider the very nature of Christian singing. In the broad context of the Bible, singing often erupts spontaneously in response to God and his truth (Exodus 15; Psalm 96: Psalm 104:33; Isaiah 42:10-17; Matthew 36:30; Acts 16:25-34; Romans 15:9; Hebrews 2:12; Revelation 15). It's not only a natural response of the heart filled with worship, it's a response expected by our Lord. In fact, in Ephesians 5:15-21 and Colossians 3:12-17, we are given specific instruction about this. While not exactly the same, the passages are similar enough that we can zero in on just one of them. So, let's take a brief look at Colossians 3:15-21 and then concentrate on verse 16:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In Colossians 3:16 (underlined), the main clause includes the verb "dwell" ("let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom"). "Dwell" is a present imperative verb...i.e. it's not a suggestion, it's a directive, a command that is to be done completely and persistently.

This main clause is followed by two participial phrases...

"...teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (teaching and admonishing)


"...singing with thanksgiving in your hearts to God" (singing)

Participial phrases are subordinate clauses that modify or complement the main clause. In other words, in the above directive from God, when we're interacting with one another, via the word of Christ richly dwelling within us, how are we to express it? Answer: we express it with songs.

The natural and expected response to the word of Christ is the song of worship. Singing both teaches and admonishes...it reinforces the word of Christ and it warns in light of the word of Christ. It also gives thanks to God.

Given that the instruction in this context is a clear and present directive and given that we see this kind of "singing" in the wider context of Scripture, we believe we've reached one of those tipping points we mentioned in our previous discussion regarding civil disobedience. The question before us then is this: Does the "congregation singing is prohibited" rule cause us to disobey the Lord? The answer is obviously "yes." So, does this conclude the matter? Do we sing anyway? The answers, again are "yes."

In conclusion, just as we have stated on many occasions, we are not law enforcement. The role of a church and its participants is persuasion and faithfulness (evangelism and discipleship), not compulsion. We recognize that both individual believers as well as individual churches may not see eye to eye on every point of Scriptural truth. Quoting from our first essay on matters regarding civil disobedience, "Sometimes, within the Lord's Church, faithful followers disagree. In fact, there are times when folks in the Body of Christ, who genuinely enjoy solid, wonderful fellowship disagree. On matters of prime importance—the essentials* of our faith—these folks stand with complete agenda harmony. However, on some things, not of prime importance, they choose to disagree with understanding, love, and compassion. This does not hurt their fellowship. In fact, if they are careful, their fellowship grows, their depth expands, their resolve tempers, and their commitment strengthens." Therefore, while we will continue following previous safety protocols, we also intend to keep singing during our services and we leave it to you to choose what is best for you and your households.



*Let the word of Christ
dwell in you richly with
all wisdom, teaching and
admonishing one another
with psalms and hymns
and spiritual songs,
singing with thankfulness
in your hearts to God.*

*Essentials: the core of Christian belief, the necessary truths of and for salvation. Examples: the Trinity, the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, Salvation by faith through grace alone, the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible...



Civil Disobedience Part Three: What if Two Good Outcomes are in Competition?

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There is little disagreement about this statement: “the last year and a half or so has been strange, exhausting, and also detrimental.” Masks, shelter-in-place orders, school closures, work from home businesses, no-visit hospitals, layoffs, and the like have pushed social-distancing into a dangerous policy of desocialization. The danger facing us is this: while protecting ourselves physically over such a long course of time we have thrown open doors unleashing a second pandemic—one with mental, emotional, social, and spiritual injuries.

Sure, we may debate over the effectiveness of government orders, but we cannot argue about the devastation leveled against those we personally know. By now, most everyone knows someone who has run up against SARS-CoV-2. In fact, it's not been unusual at all to hear folks asking for prayer on behalf of someone they know dealing with Covid-19. However, when does prolonged physical security become a stumbling block to internal well-being? It becomes a stumbling block...

- when our young, our elderly, our singular shut-ins, and others begin exhibiting signs of internal struggles and trauma.
- when our anecdotal evidence of mental and emotional struggles are corroborated by wide-spread reports and research.
- when the defense designed to create physical security becomes an offence against one's core personhood.

In this third position paper on the potential need for civil disobedience, we will briefly unpack the above, exposit God's word pertinent to the above, and conclude with our application relevant to the above.

First, we, as well as many, many churches, have and continue to encourage, nourish, and support both the church and unchurched through sometimes brutal stress produced by the year and a half of desocialization. Pre-existing conditions have been exacerbated. Elderly have been in hospitals while their family members have not been allowed to visit. Singles living alone have endured incredible loneliness. Impressionable children have grown frightened and disturbed while their social skills have been greatly hampered and derailed. Let us share just one example from national research: One summary, among many, “Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged Younger than 18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” reports the following regarding children...

“Published reports suggest that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a negative effect on children's mental health. Emergency departments (EDs) are often the first point of care for children experiencing mental health emergencies, particularly when other services are inaccessible or unavailable. During March 29–April 25, 2020, when widespread shelter-in-place orders were in effect, ED visits for persons of all ages declined 42% compared with the same period in 2019; during this time, ED visits for injury and non-COVID-19–related diagnoses decreased, while ED visits for psychosocial factors increased (4). To assess changes in mental health–related ED visits among U.S. children aged <18 years, data from CDC's National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) from January 1 through October 17, 2020, were compared with those collected during the same period in 2019. During weeks 1–11 (January 1–March 15, 2020), the average reported number of children's mental health–related ED visits overall was higher in 2020 than in 2019, whereas the proportion of children's mental health–related visits was similar. *Beginning in week 12 (March 16) the number of mental health–related ED visits among children decreased 43% concurrent with the widespread implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures; simultaneously, the proportion of mental health–related ED visits increased sharply beginning in mid-March 2020 (week 12) and continued into October (week 42) with increases of 24% among children aged 5–11 years and 31% among adolescents aged 12–17 years, compared with the same period in 2019.*” (Italics added to draw attention.)¹

The italicized portion reveals the trouble: Beginning on March 16, 2020 ER visits related to mental health issues among children dropped 43%, because of stay-at-home orders; but starting at the same time and continuing into October of 2020 (reporting period) among all ER visits by children the percentage that were mental health related rose to 24% for 5-11 and 31% for 12-17. This indicates that during this period of time mental health visits (as a percentage of the whole) to the ER increased substantially.

This problem was vividly demonstrated to one of our pastors and a friend while visiting over a meal at a local restaurant. After months of isolation, a young family ventured out to enjoy some time at the same restaurant. Their youngest, a little boy about three years old, cried uncontrollably. Mom held him tightly in her arms as she approached our pastor and his friend. She said to them, "This is our first time out. Our son is beside himself. (This was a huge understatement). We thought maybe if we asked, you might be so kind as to talk with us a little...and maybe help him feel a bit more safe." After several minutes of friendly conversation, the little boy settled down just a bit. No doubt, terror was still upon him, but at least he gained one positive exposure. He was going to need many, many more.

For an example of research regarding the increase of suicide rates related to desocialization, you might consider reading "Social Distancing Predicts Suicide Rates: Analysis of the 1918 flu Pandemic in 43 Large Cities."²

For an example of research regarding the emotional and mental problems of our elderly population related to desocialization, you might consider reading: "Impact of Social Isolation Due to COVID-19 on Health in Older People: Mental and Physical Effects and Recommendations."³

This is a huge problem. What do we do when faced with two good choices at odds with one another? Right here, right now in this momentous season of our lives, if we can't have both, which do we choose...physical security or emotional security? When must one emergency give way to another?

At the very least, we need to consider a few things:

1. Will there be an end to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic? Will variants continue to propagate? If not, will we desocialize from here forward? The answer to the first two questions is, "We don't know." The answer to the third question must be, "Absolutely not."
2. Have we given the physical safety protocols a "fair enough" try? The answer here is, "It depends on who you think is speaking more accurately." Clearly, both experts and society are divided on this dilemma.
3. What do we do when there is a clear division between ideals? How do we resolve conflict when we come to a fork in the road...especially when both directions carry some measure of wisdom? The answer here is more nuanced and completely under the province of God's word. For example, in a general sense, consider the following Proverbs...

- Proverbs 12:15 "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."

Why does this apply to the topic at hand? It's simple really, the topic at hand has grave implications. Christ followers have no faithful options other than "seeing through the lenses of God's truth."

- Psalm 119:1 "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!"

Why this truth? Again because it's relevant. It speaks to our desire to walk in the way of the Lord. So, have we walked in the way of the Lord regarding the topic at hand? Yes. Our first and second statements on civil disobedience both acknowledged the truth of God regarding "obeying the authorities" and exhorted followers of Jesus to practice it⁴

- Philippians 2:5-8 "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

And this passage? Well, if faithfulness to our Savior means anything, it certainly means becoming more and more and more like him. And what is his attitude? It's a humble attitude. Did he have to become a man? No, but he did. Did he have to humble himself? No, but he did? Did he have to give his life? No, but he did. Was this risk forced upon him? No, but he took it anyway. Why? He did so because he loves us. You see, possessing the mind of Christ by necessity means in humble love we often choose some risk on behalf of others. It's the foundation of the Golden Rule, the way of the Good Samaritan, the willingness of the Impoverished Widow, the sacrifice of the Friend Who Lays Down his Life.

So, we have given a year-plus good faith effort to masking, desocializing, medical protocols, and closing down. Still, we do not know what the future looks like regarding SARS-CoV-2 and its mutations. We also know other viruses cause great physical harm around the world (Influenza A, HIV, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C), but we do not create world wide shut down measures on account of them. Do we continue and in the continuance cause more mental, emotional, social, and spiritual harm? This question brings us to our next segment.

Second, along with recognizing the alarming cost to the souls of so many, we must also see a more detailed, more specific biblical application on behalf of those suffering on the inside. Therefore, along with the general insights of wisdom and Christlike character, let's look at a few passages that address internal harm directly.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 "And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all" (ASV)

We find three types of people in this verse: the disorderly, the fainthearted, and the weak. Here are several more translations of these three phrases...

(ESV) "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak"

(KJV) "warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak"

(NET) "admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak"

(NAS) "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak"

(NIV) "warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak"

(NLT) "warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak"

The three categories of people, then, are...

...the disorderly/idle/unruly/undisciplined/disruptive/lazy
...the fainthearted/feebleminded/discouraged/disheartened/timid
...and the weak.

Greek lexicons offer the following definitions for each of the three...

...disorderly: out of the ranks; irregular, inordinate; deviating from the prescribed order
...fainthearted: small souled; small spirited; by derivation, discouraged or small on the inside
...weak: infirm, feeble, unimpressive (can be spiritual or physical depending on the context; in this context it's spiritual)

Each of these have highly social implications. They require input from others. In the context of First Thessalonians, this input is from the Body of Christ, the Church. In other words, we need one another. Was it okay to isolate for awhile in hopes of stopping the virus? Sure. However, the longer it drags on the more severe will be the negative spiritual, emotional, and mental impact. On the positive side, we briefly saw joy and encouragement return to folks last fall during the first reopening, only to see the desocialization restored. During this summer's reopening the joy and encouragement are, once again, evident to all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 seems to apply directly.

- Mark 8:31-36 "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.' And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*' "

*For what does it profit a
man to gain the whole
world and forfeit his soul?*

In the context of teaching his followers about his coming crucifixion and departure, Jesus began to help them understand that eternal well-being is of far greater worth than physical well-being. In fact, he concluded this small portion with a bold question, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" The Lord's words once again speak directly to our present topic. Will we forever put folks at serious risk of internal harm—even spiritual harm—for the sake of physical security? Would returning to isolation be worth it? Or does it make more sense to remain open to social contact? Can we not simply encourage folks who are at high risk to seclude themselves if they choose? Can we not also be open to the idea that many may be at risk for both physical and inner risk and, after suffering on the inside for so long, may want to remain being social? Most importantly, having attempted a year-plus period of desocialization for the common good, and having come face to face with the growing threat of soulish-spiritual calamity, should we any longer suspend the importance of re-asserting our Savior's question?

- Matthew 18:1-6

"In that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling a child to himself, he put him in the middle of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives such a child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these believing little ones to stumble, it would be best for him to have a millstone—the kind turned by a donkey—hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.'"

Wow. There is no equivocation here. Jesus got some kind of serious when it came to the "little ones." For him, it is clearly not good to trip them up (to stumble). Let's look a little more carefully at a few of the pertinent words and phrases. Then, we'll sort it all out.

"...and calling a child to himself" (verses 2-5)

Here Jesus used the word for a little child. He used this example to illustrate his answer to their question. However, it's important to note this question came on the heels of a long discussion in which Jesus helps his followers understand just what kind of leader they have in him. He is unlike the unjust and dominating leaders of this world. He will die for them...for everyone. It's a discussion about all of us. While the world traffics in deception and domination, Jesus pays the ultimate price. He looks to a child and essentially says, "Here is the greatest. Here is what I'm asking you to be like...simple, innocent, believing with outstretched arms to receive the Kingdom of Heaven."

"...causes one of these believing little ones" (verse 6)

Here Jesus changes terms. While in verses two through five he used a word that literally meant child, in verse six he switched to a term that literally means small or little. So, what's going on? Once again, it's not too difficult to see. Jesus has been defining and continues in this small passage to define the nature of belief...the format—if you will—of what life with the Messiah looks like. Jesus is the King...a humble, sacrificial king. His kingdom is both heaven and earth. His subjects are described as children...both in the illustrative sense of a "child" and the literal sense of a "little one." The relationship between the King and his children is paramount. Therefore, do the children no harm.

"...to stumble" (verse 6)

The Greek word here (when anglicized—or made to look English) is scandalize. It was a specific kind of word. Yes, it meant to offend, to cause to stumble, even to harm, but it also carried with it the idea of "tripping someone up or ensnaring someone." It fit perfectly the contrast Jesus made between the world and the Kingdom of Heaven, between worldly leaders and the Messiah, between all the rest and God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The major point, then, of Matthew 18:1-6, is life with the Messiah is marked with the above characteristics. It's members are near and dear to God. Therefore, presenting stumbling blocks to their soulish-spiritual lives is fraught with great peril. This also speaks to our present topic. If asked to desocialize again in order to constrain the physical impact of Covid-19, do we do so? Do we risk, once again, creating stumbling blocks to the internal health of so many? Considering the hyperbole of a very large grinding wheel tied around the neck of a quickly sinking person, do we go backward?

Finally, (quoting from the end of our second essay on Civil Disobedience) "just as we have stated on many occasions, we are not law enforcement. The role of a church and its participants is persuasion and faithfulness (evangelism and discipleship), not compulsion. We recognize that both individual believers as well as individual churches may not see eye to eye on every point of Scriptural truth. Quoting from our first essay on matters regarding civil disobedience, 'Sometimes, within the Lord's Church, faithful followers disagree. In fact, there are times when folks in the Body of Christ, who genuinely enjoy solid, wonderful fellowship disagree. On matters of prime importance—the essentials of our faith—these folks stand with complete agenda harmony. However, on some things, not of prime importance, they choose to disagree with understanding, love, and compassion. This does not hurt their fellowship. In fact, if they are careful, their fellowship grows, their depth expands, their resolve tempers, and their commitment strengthens.'"⁴

Therefore, after much prayer and Bible study, after over a year of good faith efforts to follow protocols designed to mitigate the physical harm of SARS-CoV-2, and after seeing through both research and experience the soulish-spiritual harm of desocialization, we choose to stay our present course. We hope and pray for, even as we urge and encourage, folks to choose the path that is right for them. At the same time, seeing the certain internal harm to so many while also having no certainty regarding when or even if the SARS-CoV-2 virus will settle down, we conclude that we cannot go on with desocialization indefinitely. Man was not meant to be alone.

Footnotes

1. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: US Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mental Health-Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic. November 13, 2020 / Vol. 69 / No. 45. (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>)
2. Social Distancing Predicts Suicide Rates: Analysis of the 1918 Flu Pandemic in 43 Large Cities. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. 2021;10.1111/sltb.12729. doi:10.1111/sltb.12729 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8013904/>)
3. Impact of Social Isolation Due to COVID-19 on Health in Older People: Mental and Physical Effects and Recommendations. The Journal of Nutrition, Health and Aging, 2020; 1-10. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7514226/>)
4. <https://rickileebrooks.com/resources/> (scroll down to Civil Disobedience)

Note: This essay is not intended as an exhaustive piece of research, therefore only examples of our wide reading regarding the mental health impact of desocialization have been included.

The About Page

About Sound Communication

Sound Communication is a division of West Sound Community Church. It exists to help extend our ministry beyond our geographical location. At Sound Communication, we simply want to assist you with the skills you need to meet your unique challenges. We also want to give you a three-fold promise. First, should we accept the mission of assisting you, we will give you the absolute best of all we are and all we have to offer. Second, we will not offer what we cannot reasonably accomplish. Therefore, you can always count on us for an honest assessment of both your dilemma and our "fit" on behalf of your dilemma. Third, anything you can purchase from Sound Communication in hard-copy you can also download for free.

About Ricki Lee Brooks

Jesus said fields all across the world are ready for the harvest. He wants as many as possible to hear his life-changing message...and, at Sound Communication, we can think of no greater privilege than being a part of a team that delivers that message. Believers since the first century have dedicated themselves to this task. The times in which we live are no different. Faithful messengers still proclaim God's great message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Ricki Lee Brooks is just one among many of those messengers.

Ricki is the father of three and grandfather of four. All three of his children are happily married.

His heart is to help others overcome adversity by learning to truly walk in the presence of the Savior. Many years of ministry have allowed this in the lives of both adults and the next generations. Throughout the years, the addition of speaking on behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Community Abstinence and Relationship Education (CARE), camps, retreats, and ECOLA Bible School has been both a ministry blessing and benefit.

Over 40 years ago, he and his wife, Vanita, wrote down their mission statement for life. Here it is...

Our mission in life is to love our Lord, one another, and our children more and more every day and to help as many as possible to do the same thing.

Since then much has changed. His children walk with the Lord as they grow their own families. Many have heard the life-changing news of Jesus Christ and are falling more in love with the Savior. And, sadly, yet triumphantly, Vanita is now with the Lord. One might think the death of Ricki's beloved would change the mission statement. It has not. After losing Vanita at the hands of a drunk driver, Ricki has often said, "Without her, I feel less effective, but not less impassioned. Helping people love the Lord is the greatest privilege on earth."

Whether talking with an individual on a park bench, leading a small seminar, or speaking to a large audience...whether the topic is specific to an organization or general and universal to the human condition...Ricki knows people wrestle with similar issues—who am I, why am I here, is there more to life? Failing to answer these questions inevitably leads to SID (spiritual identity disorder). It pushes individuals into drift mode and organizations into corporate anomie. Facing this kind of adversity can be either a positive challenge or a negative pitfall for both individuals and organizations. Ricki's role is to help you toward the positive.

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