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“When it’s OK to Disobey”

Acts 3-4

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Eventually, all Christians’ faith will be tested in the areas of conscience and duty—to see whether they have the courage to obey God rather than man, wherever man’s law and authority contradicts the higher law and authority of God. The early church practiced civil disobedience wherever that contradiction existed. We have been living in a time more recently when government and/or employer policies, laws, and ordinances are increasingly at odds with God—with God’s policies, laws, and ordinances. Christians in America are having to decide, “Who is really Lord?” And whom will you obey—God or man? Christians should be the best citizens, living in subjection to governing authority, praying for and respecting our leaders—but where the contradiction exists, may God help us to say, as the early church did, “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29)

1. **Acts 3:1-10** - *“Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, ‘Look at us.’ So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”*
2. God used Peter to heal a man unable to walk
 - a. This was the first miracle of the early church

- b. Verse 10 says the people “were filled with wonder and amazement” at the sight of this miracle
 - c. Peter used the opportunity to give God the glory and share the Gospel
 - i. **Acts 3:12-19** - *“So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: ‘Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.’”*
 - d. About two thousand men were saved, bringing the early church total to about five thousand men (plus women and children)
 - i. **Acts 4:4** - *“However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”*
 - e. It is the Word of God that brings people to repentance
3. Peter and John were taken into custody
- a. The Jewish leaders objected to the message, not the miracle
 - b. They still believed the sacrificial system was the only way to reconciliation with God and therefore believed the Gospel message was heretical
 - c. They had Peter and John placed in jail
 - i. **Acts 4:1-4:3** - *“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”*
 - d. The leaders did not understand that Jesus did not defy the law, but rather fulfilled the law
 - i. **Matthew 5:17** - *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **Acts 4:12** - *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

4. Peter and John refused to stop sharing about Jesus
 - a. The Sanhedrin tried to silence their speech
 - i. [Acts 4:17-18](#) - *“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.’ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”*
 - b. Peter and John refused to stop following Jesus’ command to preach the Gospel
 - i. [Mark 16:15](#) - *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”*
 - ii. [Acts 4:19-20](#) - *“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. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’”*

5. When is civil disobedience acceptable to God?
 - a. Civil disobedience is acceptable to God when man’s law or authority contradicts the higher law or authority of God
 - b. Examples of civil disobedience in the Bible
 - i. Exodus 1
 1. The Egyptian Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all newborn baby boys, but the midwives did not do as Pharaoh commanded
 - ii. Daniel 3
 1. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the people worship a gold image; Israelites Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to worship the gold image
 - iii. Daniel 6
 1. The Babylonian king Darius commanded that people may not pray to anyone except him; Daniel continued to pray to the Lord
 - c. If you are going to engage in civil disobedience, you must have a clear Scriptural basis and directive from God to do so
 - i. Christians’ love for God should cause them to submit to the governing authorities unless doing so would violate God’s law
 - ii. In each of the Scripture examples above, God protected the people from harm—but there is no guarantee
 - d. [Acts 5:29](#) - *“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 3:1-10](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.

2. What did Peter do when the people were “amazed” at the sight of a miracle? What example should this set for us? (See #2c above).
3. Why did the Jewish leaders take Peter and John into custody? What did the Jewish leaders not understand about the Gospel? (See #3a, #3b, and #3d above)
4. Read [Acts 4:19-20](#). How did Peter and John respond to the command to stop sharing the Gospel? (See #4b above)
5. When is civil disobedience acceptable to God? (See #5a above)
6. Discuss examples of civil disobedience found in Scripture. (See #5b above)
7. How would a Christian know if engaging in civil disobedience is the right thing to do? (See #5c above)
8. Read [Acts 5:29](#). Who is our ultimate authority? (See #5d above)
9. Discuss what Godly civil disobedience looks like.
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)