



An initiative of WISCONSIN FAMILY COUNCIL

Tuesday May 5, 2020

Is It Time for Civil Disobedience?

Dear Pastor,

After Gov. Evers communicated recently that Wisconsin would remain “closed” until (at least) May 24, a Wisconsin pastor asked me if it was time for civil disobedience. I believe he is a good and godly man. He was not being brash or rebellious. It was a fair question, and I believe it was motivated by legitimate concerns for his ministry, other ministries around the state, and the well-being of families and communities in general. There is also the “little” matter of constitutional rights.

Clearly there are times when civil disobedience is required. When Darius issued a decree forbidding prayer to anyone other than himself, Daniel practiced civil disobedience and continued his regular practice of prayer to the One True God (Daniel 6). And we should note, he was willing to pay the price of obeying God, even if that price was his life. Daniel’s colleagues also had their own “trial by fire” for civil disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:16-18).

Peter and John were stalwart in not kowtowing to the authorities when they were commanded to stop preaching Jesus. “We ought to obey God rather than men,” (Acts 5:29; Cf. Acts 4:19-20). The apostles also were willing to obey God, even if it cost their lives. And Jesus was clear, of course, that while we render to Caesar his due, we also have a higher calling to render to God those things that are His due.



So, what does this have to do with our current circumstances? I would say everything, and also, not much.

Biblical truth has everything to do with our current circumstances. It will always be true that our first allegiance is to the King of kings and His Kingdom. We are His ambassadors. We are salt and light, and our attitude and our actions must always be seasoned with grace and conditioned by the truth that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven. Which brings me to the “not much” part.

Thankfully, whether we like or agree with some of the specifics of the “shut down,” at least our governor has acknowledged that churches are considered to be essential. Further, no governmental entity that I am aware of has told pastors or churches what they may or may not preach. And meetings have not been prohibited per se, though the size and manner of meeting must conform to certain guidelines. There might come a time for civil disobedience. I’m not sure we are there yet.* First, let’s see how the State Supreme Court rules on the Governor’s actions and whether or not the legislature is able to enact a more reasonable plan than what the Governor has put forth.

So, if this is not a time for civil disobedience, what is it a time for?

1. **Prayer.** Pray for those directly and indirectly impacted by the virus. Pray for our health-care workers and first responders. Pray for our elected officials to make wise decisions not sourced in fear or politics. Pray for our State Supreme Court as they wrestle with what is being done in our state (oral hearings were heard this morning in a suit against Governor Evers’ secretary-designee to the Department of Health Services, Andrea Palm). Pray that we as God’s people will maintain a clear gospel testimony. Pray that we will not be caught up in partisan political battles. Pray that we will exercise Christian deference if/when we don’t see eye to eye on how our state is handling this epidemic. Pray that we will be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Pray that people in our communities will see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven.
2. **Communication.** Call, write or email your elected officials. He can find your elected official [HERE](#). Thank them for working on this issue. Let them know what you and your church are able to do to help. Let them know what your concerns are. If you believe you can begin meeting again, safely, let them know your reason and what your plans are to protect, as much as humanly possible, the people in your church. This is an excellent time to begin or grow your relationship with your elected officials at the local and state levels—always with a desire to ultimately share the good news of the Gospel with them.
3. **Maintaining a biblical attitude and perspective.** Romans 8:28 is still true. God is working all things together for good.
4. **Planning.** Begin making plans now for resuming services as a convened church body. That will look differently for different churches depending on their demographics, location in the state, facilities, etc. Anticipate that getting back to “normal” will be a process that does not happen overnight. For helpful resources, see our website [HERE](#).

If pastors or churches were told to not preach the gospel, then there is no question: We must obey God rather than men. If Christians are told they may not promote in any way any teaching the culture deems intolerant, then of course, we must continue to teach and preach God's good truth. If we are told that we must promote and affirm teaching that is contrary to and hostile to Scripture, or that we are permanently restricted from meeting as a church body, then yes, these would be occasions for civil disobedience.

For now, let us treat honorably those serving in government and pray for them. Let us also extend grace to one another when we don't see eye to eye on what the right or best response is relative to this epidemic. Good people can and do disagree on things. In addition to the death and destruction caused by the virus, the devil would love to see disunity in the church. By God's grace, may we not give the devil that or any other victory as we lift up Jesus's name to a fearful and needy world. In Christ,



Dave Lingle
WFC Church Ambassador



PS: Be sure to join us for our worldview webinar with Joseph Backholm this Thursday at noon. Advance registration is required. You can find more details and registration for the webinar [HERE](#). Feel free to share the registration information with your church family.

* "...we think on some occasions civil disobedience is not only morally permissible but even obligatory. Specifically, it is proper when a Christian is asked to do something directly contrary to the revealed will of God and thus contrary to the dictates of moral conscience. Of course, this needs amplification. We think living in a democratic society makes a difference. In such a society, individuals have more rights in formulating the laws and more opportunities for legal and political redress of unjust laws. So, when someone living in a democracy sees immoral laws but is not asked to do something immoral, he should at least initially seek redress through legal and political channels... There is only a moral obligation to act outside the law if I am directly required to do something contrary to Scripture." (Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for A Brave New World*, first edition, 1993, p. 401)