

## Subjection To Government (2)

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### Divinely Approved Instances of Civil Disobedience

There is a definite pattern in every example of divinely approved civil disobedience. First, a command by divinely appointed authorities that is contrary to the Word of God; second, an act of disobedience to that command; and finally, some kind of explicit or implicit divine approval of the refusal to obey the authorities.

- In Exodus 1:15-21, Pharaoh commands that every male Hebrew baby be killed by the widwives. But Shiphrah and Puah *“feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live”* (1:17). As a result, God was kind to them and multiplied the Israelites even more.
- Later, Pharaoh is confronted by Moses in Exodus 5, who requests, *“Let my people go, so that we may hold a festival to the Lord in the desert.”* Pharaoh responds, *“Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go”* (5:2). After a spectacular display of God’s power, the Israelites do end up leaving Egypt (Exodus 7-12).
- In 1 Kings 18:4, wicked Queen Jezebel was in the process of killing off the Lord’s prophets. In defiance of the orders, the prophet Obadiah *“had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves... and had supplied them with food and water.”* Although God never explicitly approves of the situation, it is presented in such a way (18:13-15) that one would be wrong to ignore the implicit righteousness in the story, since no government has the right to kill innocent servants of God.
- An order was given in Daniel 3:5 that all people were to bow before an image of gold set up by Nebuchadnezzar. But three Hebrew men defiantly respond, *“We want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up”* (3:18). As a result, God blesses them with protection as they miraculously survive the fiery furnace, totally unscathed.
- A truly classic example of civil disobedience is found in Daniel 6, in which the prophet Daniel, a servant of the government himself, refused to obey an order that anyone *“who prayed to any god or man during the next thirty days shall be thrown into the lions’ den”* (6:7). Daniel defies the order by steadfastly praying on his knees to God, three times a day just as he had always done (6:10). God delivers Daniel for his faith.
- As has already been alluded to earlier, Peter defies civil authority in Acts 4:18ff by continuing to proclaim the Gospel. Because of his stand, the people praise God for what had happened (4:21). God’s approval is shown in the fact that immediately after being released and praising, all the people who had gathered to hear of the ordeal were filled with Holy Spirit (4:31).
- Even in apocalyptic writing, civil disobedience is encouraged when evil governments compel citizens to commit unrighteousness (Revelation 12-13).

There is a right way and a wrong way to disobey civil authority. All of the above examples illustrate:

- God's people in each example refuse to obey a command, but they do not revolt against *authority in general*.
- Divinely approved disobedience is always non-violent. Even when their enemies beat them, imprisoned them, and murdered them, physical, personal retaliation is never approved by God (Romans 12:17-21).
- The believers did not refuse the government's punishment, but accepted it calmly. When Daniel or Peter disobey, they quietly accept whatever lawful punishment they are due. Paul would have done the same (Acts 25:11).
- It is a legitimate form of civil disobedience to flee from oppressive government, if possible. Obadiah and Elijah flee from Jezebel, just as the Israelites leave Egypt in the Exodus. None of the above believers in God waged a war, planned a revolt, or staged a coup.
- It is not that we should ignore peaceful, legal means of actively overcoming oppression, but that we should never take the law into our own hands, since "*the authorities which exist have been established by God*" (Romans 13:1). We must follow proper procedures if we want to change something about our government (Ecc. 8:5-6). When we cannot accept their command to do evil, we must either flee or submit to punishment.