

FAQ from GCF on Civil disobedience and the current crisis!

1. What does the Bible say about submission to civil authority?

- a. First, the Bible unambiguously commands Christians to submit to the civil authorities, even the unjust ones (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; Titus 3:1-2). In describing the historical context of Romans 13, one scholar writes, “Caligula and Nero were two of the most depraved madmen ever to exercise despotic rule over people. And the Christians themselves were the object of their vitriolic hatred. Yet Paul said, ‘Submit.’”¹ The biblical texts listed above imply that we must joyfully obey traffic laws, pay taxes, and pull permits for bonfires. Second, Christians must honor the civil authorities with their prayers, actions, attitudes, and words (Eccl. 5:20; John 19:11; 1 Tim. 2:1-4). To summarize, Christians must obey and honor the civil authorities since God ordained them (Rom. 13:1). Yet, there are characters in the Bible who are honored for disobeying the civil authorities.

2. What does the Bible say about civil disobedience?

- a. The Bible honors Rahab of Jericho (Heb. 11:31), the Egyptian midwives (Ex. 1), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3), Daniel (Dan. 6), and the Apostles (Acts 4:17-20; 5:29) for disobeying the civil authorities. Christian ethicists argue, from these texts, that Christians have grounds for defying the civil authorities when told to do something that God forbids or forbidden from doing something that God commands. Ethicist Robertson McQuilkin writes, “Thus, when commanded to disobey the revealed will of God, the Christian must disobey that human command; when forbidden to do something good that is not mandated by Scripture, the Christian may, under some circumstances, disobey the human command.”²

3. Does GCF have grounds for civil disobedience?

- a. **Some argue that we have grounds for civil disobedience since our governor forbids us from gathering on the Lord’s day.** Responding to this argument requires some background. During New Testament times, the saints gathered on the first day of the week for worship (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:1-11). Christians started calling the first day of the week the Lord’s day since it was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Summing up the relevant texts on this topic, one scholar writes, “In the early church, then, the Christians began to give a special place to Sunday as the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead. It soon became a fixed day for worship, a celebration of the resurrection centered around the Lord’s Supper.”³ Although gathering on the Lord’s day was the pattern of the early church, some argue that it is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament. This brings up Hebrews 10:24-25? The author of Hebrews writes, “*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*” (Heb. 10:24–25, ESV) In order to understand this text, we must understand its historical context. These words were addressed to Christians that were skipping church, because they were tempted to go back to Judaism. We don’t know of anyone who is skipping church because they are tempted to walk away from Jesus. People are staying home from church out of obedience to Romans 13. Therefore, we don’t think that Heb.10:24-25 applies directly to the current situation. To summarize, the New Testament reveals a pattern of gathering on the Lord’s day for worship. Furthermore, the author

¹ Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 1995), 484.

² McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 484.

³ *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1996), 489.

of Hebrews urges Christians, especially those tempted to fall away from Christ, to gather with the saints for edification. How do these texts apply to our situation? We don't believe that we are disregarding the pattern of the early church nor the spirit of Heb. 10:24-25 by obeying governor Inslee's orders. We can still gather for worship on the Lord's day, just not in the way that we prefer. Therefore, we don't think that civil disobedience is required at the moment. If it becomes apparent that the governor's laws are targeting Christians, we will be forced to reconsider our position.

- b. **Others argue that laws forbidding gathering for worship are unconstitutional, therefore they must be disobeyed.** There are three variations of this argument. First, some argue that they have a first amendment right to worship regardless of the circumstances. Second, others say that governor Inslee has the constitutional power to suspend our freedoms for a season when there is a catastrophic emergency. Since this group is not convinced that the medical data supports this claim, they don't believe that the governor has constitutional powers to lock down the state. Third, others argue that it is discriminatory, therefore unconstitutional, for the governor to keep pot shops, casinos, Wal-Marts, abortion clinics, Boeing factories, and the liquor stores open while forcing churches to remain closed. According to our constitution, no one has the right to buy pot, yet all citizens have the right to gather for worship. At this point, a legal case could be made for disobeying the governor's commands in regard to worship. But we currently believe it is wiser to work through the legal system to achieve our goals. To that end, we are consulting with the lawyers at the Alliance Defending Freedom to legally get us back to worship as soon as possible. Please pray for wisdom.

4. When we gather again, how will you ensure our safety?

- a. The elders of GCF care significantly about the health and safety of every human being, especially the weak, vulnerable, and sick. This concern is based on the conviction that every human being is made in the image of God. Therefore, we will do everything in our power to ensure the health and safety of all who chose to gather with us in the future. In addition, we will encourage anyone with health concerns to stay home. Finally, the elders put together a subcommittee to explore the health and safety issues involved in regathering on the Lord's day. They are consulting with the medical professionals in our community and the CDC.

5. How do we preserve unity at GCF?

- a. The church's response to the Covid-19 crisis has tremendous potential to separate believers. Disunity is precisely what Satan wants. We must do everything in our power to keep this from happening. The issues involved are complex, requiring knowledge of ethics, theology, medicine, public policy, and constitutional law. We should not be surprised when godly, well informed, and discerning Christians disagree on what to do next. The current crisis creates the perfect context to work extra hard at putting on love, patience, and kindness. Furthermore, we exhort all of you to respect the consciences of others, especially when they disagree with you on this complex issue (Romans 14).