

Daniel 6 and Civil Disobedience 12-12-21

If the Theme of Daniel outside of prophecy were to be considered, it would be the idea of “No Compromise”. Daniel 1 reflects the determination of Daniel, Mishael, Hannaniah and Azariah not to compromise by eating the king’s foods. Daniel 3 shows the unwillingness to compromise when it comes to idols. Daniel 5 can be seen through a lens of not compromising on truth. Finally, Daniel 6 is a lesson of how Daniel chose not to compromise on prayer.

Daniel 6 records that Daniel (after the collapse of Babylon) was found to be an efficient administrator by the Persians to the degree that he was going to be elevated to the position of Prime Minister of the region. His enemies, knowing of his devotion to God, concocted a scheme that, by outlawing prayer, they could have him executed. The law is passed and Daniel quietly but publically continues his prayers, and is arrested and sentenced. Yet when the sentence (being cast into the den of lions) is executed, God sends an angel to close the lion’s mouths and save him.

We see the significance here of trusting God. Yet another lesson is here too on the nature of our civic responsibility and civil disobedience.

Christians are under a divine command to submit to the authorities of our government. Jesus said "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" in Matthew 22:21. Peter said "*Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good*" in 1 Peter 2:13-14. Paul told the Romans to render to the Romans taxes, customs, fears and honors as due to them in Romans 13:1-8. It is clear that our respect and submission to our leaders is an important part of being disciples of Jesus Christ.

It is even taught to us that when a government is corrupt, unholy, and seeking to harm us, we still submit. Consider the events of Acts 23:1-5. There Paul was unjustly assaulted by an illegitimate government, and yet he still respected what was right in the sight of men, going so far as to acknowledge he had erred in verbally speaking against the high priest. Often our mindset is that we do not need to submit to unrighteous rulers, yet that seems to be the case in most rulers of the New Testament.

But what about when man’s law crosses God’s law? In Acts 5:29, the Apostles had been commanded to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. They all replied the same: "*we must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). Thus an important exception to the (all of the) laws of submission is found: when there is a conflict between the commandments of God and man, God’s law comes first. This is the only permission for Christian civil disobedience.

The question then remains as to what does “civil disobedience” look like? Daniel 6 is the answer to this question. When man’s law conflicted God’s law, Daniel moved into a model of civil disobedience. First, note that there was no malice or hate or anger in his actions. Second, there was an absence of subterfuge (meaning he did not lie or deceive in his actions). Finally, his disobedience was confined only to the matter of question. This warring of God and man’s laws did not permit an all-out rebellion.

There is much to consider in the importance of this event. First, when it is man’s law vs. God’s law, it is clear that we must obey God and not man. If our government says we cannot worship (regardless of the motivation), we must still worship. When man’s law says we cannot say certain things, we must speak the

truth. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ, and that includes when man's rules say otherwise. We are not to be disrespectful in that disobedience, nor does it by extension move to other parts of man's law that are not in conflict with God's law. Many worry that such behavior consists of a permissive attitude that allows our persecutors carte blanche to harm us. But the most important part of the lesson of Daniel 6 is that our liberties in Christ are guaranteed by Christ. We are not defending our liberties as God is watching out for us. Immediately prior to Paul's language in Romans 13 he tells us that God is our avenger, and God will act for us to deliver us.

There have been and will always be times when the laws of man conflict with the laws of God. We must render to God what belongs to God. Yet Daniel demonstrates that this civil disobedience can be done in a manner that does not involve a spirit of rebellion and contention.