

WHEN TO DISOBEY:

**A Theology of
Resistance
for
Reluctant Protestants**

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PART ONE

In July 1933, during Hitler's first summer in power, a young German pastor named Joachim Hossenfelder preached a sermon in the towering Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, Berlin's most important church. He used the words of Romans 13 to remind worshippers of the importance of obedience to those in authority. The church was all decked out with Nazi banners, its pews packed with the Nazi faithful and soldiers in uniform.

Earlier that same year, Friedrich Dibelius, a German bishop and one of the highest Protestant officials in the country, had also preached on Romans 13 to justify all the Nazi seizures of power and brutal policies, and misquoting Martin Luther himself about the supposed paramount powers of state authority.¹

Three days after this sermon, the German parliament dissolved and Hitler took over. Within a few years, six million Jews had been slaughtered and the world devastated by World War Two.



¹ The dean of the Magdeburg Cathedral exulted in the Nazi flags prominently displayed in his church. "Whoever reviles this symbol of ours is reviling our Germany," he declared. "The swastika flags around the altar radiate hope—hope that the day is at last about to dawn." When German churches close to railways would hear the cries of Jews being hauled off to the gas chambers, they were told to sing louder to drown out the interruption. (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-32/radical-resistance.html>)

Likewise, Romans 13 was a favourite text of presidents John Vorster and PW Botha here in South Africa to defend the evils of apartheid. Said Botha on Easter 1985 when addressing the Zion Christian Church masses of worshippers at their 'Mt. Moriah', quoting straight out of Romans 13:

The Bible ... has a message for the governments and the governed of the world. Thus we read in Romans 13 that every person be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God. Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad conduct. Do what is good and you will receive the approval of the ruler. He is God's servant for your good.

Recall that before the biblical clarity and bravery of our Protestant Reformers, for centuries the Dark Ages revolved around the great lie of the "divine right of kings" (i.e., 'Rex Lex', 'The King is Law'). Most of Europe at the time believed that if you were from the royal dynasty, God must have put you on that throne, and everyone obeys you, always and unconditionally.

Because of this one deadly myth, the divine right of kings was used to justify the slaughter of countless innocent people and many of our Christian forefathers. Yes, God was sovereign. Yes, Christ was exalted through these faithful martyrs. But realise that many of these brutal kings and tyrannical monarchs eagerly quoted Romans 13 to justify a pagan, godless ideology.

One New Testament scholar writes that the misuse of Romans 13 has "caused more unhappiness and misery...than any other seven verses in the New Testament by the license they have given to tyrants...used to justify a host of horrendous abuses of individual human rights."²

But you say, 'Hitler's Holocaust and racist Apartheid have nothing to do with responding to a global pandemic!' To which the verdict of history answers: Both the Jews in Germany and blacks in South Africa were viewed as a threat to public health and national security (the "Swart Gevaar", the "black danger")³. 'Trust us,' said government tearfully, 'we truly have your best interests at heart. All we want to do is help, to keep you safe. Nothing more, we promise.'

Friends, do you realise? By legalising abortion, world governments kill more unborn babies in *one year* than all the lives Covid-19 would kill in 100 years at the current rate (always in the name of "women's *health*" and "reproductive *health*")! Already, by mid-January 2021, over *two million* babies have been murdered by these wonderful, loving governments that are so concerned about human safety and public health. Not to mention countries like here in South Africa, where violent crime is still rampant and out of control; yet suddenly our authorities have an incredible zeal about protecting you and me?

William Pitt (famed Prime Minister of UK, close friend of William Wilberforce) once wrote, "Necessity (i.e., 'public health, common good', etc.) is the plea of every

²<https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5576&context=lawreview>

³ Jesus was no stranger to conflicts over hygiene protocols: Matt. 15:1-20. Listen to Jordan Peterson describes Hitler's obsession with hand-washing: <https://youtu.be/XBu6x1iUM0>

infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants. It is the creed of slaves.”⁴ Get people afraid, and they’ll do whatever you want. A fearful society will always comply; panicking people will believe anything.

During the gruesome and bloody days of the French Revolution, when 40,000 innocent citizens lost their heads, simply because a neighbour snitched on them – *who* was it that operated the guillotine day and night? It was run by the *Committee for Public Safety*.

Theologian Owen Strachan recently wrote:

We need church. Embodied congregational worship of Christ is essential--in all seasons. Should we be wise, and thoughtful, and even careful? Yes we should. Wisdom is not the enemy of divine commands, however. We modern Christians may have many "options" regarding whether we go to church or not, but outside of serious health concerns (and even possibly including them on a case-by-case basis), we do not have the "option" of skipping congregational worship.

Our society says this is so, but our society is subsuming an entire ideology under the banner of "public health," one of the least-explored and most-exploited concepts on planet earth today. When you hear that term "public health," your brain should switch on, and you should examine very critically what you hear from that point forward.

Discernment is not optional for Christians, who must mature so that we have our “senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14; Prov. 15:14; 18:15). Church leaders must point the way in watchful discernment and pastoral vigilance, like watchmen on the wall that first see the danger and warn the people before it’s too late, lest they have blood on their hands (Tit. 1:9; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim. 4:6; Ezek. 33). Kings are called to “search out a matter”; they cannot be mentally lazy or driven emotionally more than rationally, swayed by anecdotes more than arguments (Prov. 25:2; Prov. 2:1-6).

Like the noble sons of Issachar, we must “understand the times” (1 Chron. 12:32). As God’s Word warns, we must not be “taken captive through philosophy and empty deception”, and must not “be conformed to this world, but transformed by the

⁴ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00008337>

renewing of our minds” (Col. 2:8; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:3-5).⁵ After all, our Puritan heroes and forefathers were known as Non-conformists, willing to swim upstream.⁶

In this essay I’d like for us to explore *two biblical reasons for disobeying lesser authorities out of obedience to our highest authority, the Lord Jesus Christ*. Once you are convinced of this biblical duty, there are times that it is not only an option but a mandate for civil disobedience. First, we’ll look at the three God-ordained spheres of authority. Second, we’ll dig into a right use of Romans 13.

PART TWO

(1) Civil Disobedience May Be Required Because of the Three Biblical Spheres of Authority

This must be our fundamental starting point in this discussion; otherwise, nothing makes sense: *God alone has absolute authority, none other, regardless of what they may claim*. Only the triune LORD has inherent, intrinsic, and undelegated authority; unlimited dominion, unconditional and unqualified rule and reign over all His creation and all His creatures, including humanity. God requires permission from no one (Matt. 28:18; Romans 13:1). As Abraham Kuyper famously said, “There’s not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”

Our local association of churches, Sola5, holds to a number of excellent, biblically-grounded, historically-rooted Core Values. Of these, the 3rd value is called, “Authority”⁷ Under our Almighty God and King, He has established *three spheres of human government and earthly authority/sovereignty*.⁸

(a) The Family Sphere of Authority

⁵ Here are a few proven, tested resources (websites & published books) challenging the mainstream Covid narrative and the bigger agendas at stake: <https://swprs.org/> ; <https://gbdeclaration.org/> ; <https://www.pandata.org/> ; <https://www.aier.org/article/whats-up-with-the-great-reset/>
The Price of Panic: How the Tyranny of Experts Turned a Pandemic Into a Catastrophe
(https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B087CLDWFB&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_bhNeGbFRYQQVD)
Liberty or Lockdown, by Jeffrey Tucker
(https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B08K7QFNK4&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_1vNeGbW5RM02Y)
Unreported Truths About Covid-19 & Lockdowns, by Alex Berenson
(https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B08QND25GL&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_XwNeGbF4JHNPH).

⁶ A virtue that shines all the brighter against today’s obsession with political correctness, Woke-ness, cancel culture, intolerance of dissent, Big Tech (Big Brother) censorship and assault on free speech.

⁷ <http://sola5.org/core-value-3-authority/>; also introduced in Wayne Grudem’s, *Systematic Theology* (pp. 891-893)

⁸ Abraham Kuyper helped formulate these 3 spheres in his classic, *Lectures on Calvinism*; see here for a brief introduction: <https://blog.emergingscholars.org/2014/09/sphere-sovereignty/> In our day, Joe Boot has defended these scriptural categories in light of the current threats to the Church and society: <https://www.ezrainstitute.ca/resource-library/articles/freedom-the-church-and-state-absolutism/>

Sola5 states that this 1st and most foundational sphere “is for the upbringing and education of children, as well as for the nurturing of orderly human relationships in honour, discipline and love. The family is the basic unit of society (Eph. 5:22–6:4; Deut. 6:4–9).” The family symbol of authority is the *rod of correction*, the very thing being outlawed by godless state governments (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14).

Think of God’s design for the family as, ‘The Ministry of Health, Education and Welfare’, as responsible for the care of both soul and body. From food, clothing and shelter, to curfews, beliefs, and choosing a spouse and career – never in Scripture are these tasks assigned to the state, but always to the family (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:7-9; 1 Cor. 7:36-38; Eph. 5:22-6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8),. Nowhere does the Bible hold secular governments responsible for universal healthcare. Always that is listed as a family duty first, and then secondarily a church duty in caring for her widows and orphans (1 Tim. 5:1-16; Jam. 1:26-27).

South African pastor, David deBruyn, warns of what happens when the state transgresses into the family sphere:

Governments now get voted into power by promising to oversee housing, education, medicine, the economy, a good currency, a minimum income, food, water, land, and the list goes on. The government becomes a parent, and the citizens are dependents. The government in this role becomes a monstrous juggernaut of bureaucracy, devouring taxes and trying to regulate every detail of life.

(b) The Church Sphere of Authority

Our Sola5 statement goes on to say, “Church government is for the spiritual well-being and ministry of God’s people (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 13:7,17). The local church’s God-given symbol of authority are the *keys of the kingdom* – admitting and excluding members based on the gospel of Christ alone. Consider God’s design for the church as, ‘The Ministry of the Word and Sacrament’. Scripture calls the church’s main focus to be, not the care of bodies, but souls (Heb. 13:17). Only King Jesus gets to complete this sentence, ‘You may worship if....’⁹

⁹ Here are two recent and definitive biblical statements of this position, from churches in two different countries: <https://trinitybiblechapel.ca/here-we-stand-the-church-must-meet/> <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B200723> (This Grace Community Church elder’s statement clearly limits a church’s civil disobedience in a worship service to three areas of Caesar’s present overreach: attendance caps; prohibiting singing; mandating social distancing.)

Right now in churches around the world, a crisis of spiritual authority is occurring that is testing believer's understanding and application of this 2nd biblical sphere. Members are watching to see how their leaders handle Covid and lockdowns, and should keep praying much for them. God's Word is clear: "...be subject to your elders"; "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch *over your souls* as those who will give an account" (1 Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:17). It is a sad day when the body of Christ is paying more attention to Caesar's fallible regulations than to Christ's infallible Book and the loving counsel of their spiritual leaders who know and care for them.



Duly appointed church leaders are God's legitimate authorities over the spiritual health of their flock, and all of their biblical instructions must be obeyed, whether one agrees with them or not. Of course members can appeal, clarify, and engage with their leaders; but mutiny or divisiveness is not an option (1 Thess. 5:12; Rom. 16:17; Eph. 4:1-6; Tit. 3:10-11). More than ever, believers need to turn off the media and sit at the feet of their own godly, wise, proven shepherds (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24-4:5).

The flock are being bombarded by today's popular narratives; they urgently need to hear the calming, clear voice of their Good Shepherd through His appointed under-shepherds expounding His Word (John 10:16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Members can rest in knowing that, in the end, their leaders are the ones who will answer to Christ for how they've led the flock (John 20:15-19; Acts 20:28; Jam. 3:1).

In terms of how the church sphere relates to the government sphere, esteemed theologian John Murray wrote:

The sphere of the church is distinct from that of the civil magistrate ... What needs to be appreciated now is that its sphere is co-ordinate with that of the state. The church is not subordinate to the state, nor is the state subordinate to the church. They are both subordinate to God, and to Christ in his mediatorial dominion as head over all things to his body the church. Both church and state are under obligation to recognize this subordination, and the corresponding co-ordination of their respective spheres of operation in the divine institution.

Each must maintain and assert its autonomy in reference to the other and preserve its freedom from intrusion on the part of the other. ...when the civil magistrate trespasses the limits of his authority, it is incumbent upon the church to expose and condemn such a violation of his authority.¹⁰

R.B. Kuiper's classic text, *The Glorious Body of Christ*, rings out with a biblical rebuke to his age and to ours:

Our age is one of ecclesiastical pacifism. ...When a church ceases to be militant it also ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ. ...A truly militant church

¹⁰ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 1:253-54

stands opposed to the world both without its walls and within. ...Time and again in its history the church has found it necessary to assert its sovereignty over against usurpations by the state.

Kuiper then gives biblical examples – like when King Saul or King Uzziah usurped the priesthood (1 Sam. 13; 2 Chron. 26), stating, “...In both cases, a representative of the state was severely punished for encroaching upon the sovereignty of the church.”

Lord Macauley of England summed up the Puritan reputation this way: “*He bowed himself in the dust before his Maker; but he set his foot on the neck of his king.*” As Kuiper continues:

...Ours is an age of state totalitarianism. All over the world statism is [rising]... In consequence, in many lands the church finds itself utterly at the mercy of the state whose mercy often proves cruelty, while in others the notion is rapidly gaining ground that the church exists and operates by the state's permission.

Now, if ever, is the time for the church to assert its sovereignty over against encroachments by the state. The church is in sacred duty bound to rise up in majesty and proclaim to the world that it enjoys freedom of worship, not by the grace of the state, but as a God-given right; and that it preaches the Word of God, not by the grace of human governments, but solely at the command of the sovereign God and its sovereign King, seated at God's right hand.

...It must be admitted to the church's shame that it has often cowered before the state. ...those power-hungry potentates who neither fear God nor regard man but take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us' (Ps. 2), must be told by the church that He that sits in the heavens will laugh, that the Lord will have them in derision, and that if they fail to kiss the Son, He will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Let the church speak sovereignly for the sovereign God and the 'blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords' (1 Tim. 6:15).

To which our churches give a thunderous reply, “Amen and amen!”

PART THREE

Often in Scripture we see ungodly submission to authority, an obedience that dishonours God: Doeg the Edomite obeys the king to murder 85 priests (1 Sam. 22); Bathsheba obeyed the king to commit adultery with him, and Joab obeyed to murder her husband (2 Sam. 11); soldiers obeyed wicked rulers by putting the innocent, righteous ones into prison (1 Kgs 22; Matt. 26:55-27:66); Aaron obeyed the voice of the people with the golden calf (Exod. 32).¹¹



No Christian wants to displease his/her Lord with an unrighteous submission to earthly authorities. That's why we are exploring here the first of two *biblical reasons for disobeying lesser authorities out of obedience to our highest authority, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

(1) Civil Disobedience May Be Required By the Three Biblical Spheres of Authority

Above we looked at: (a) the family sphere of authority; (b) the church sphere of authority. Now let's dig into the third God-established domain of human sovereignty:

(c) The state sphere of authority

We see government first established by God after the flood to institute the death penalty on murderers and establish the value of human life (Genesis 9:6). In the Old Testament we get to see God governing a nation directly through theocratic laws, judges and kings. In the New Testament the apostle Paul makes it clear that even a godless state is a servant of God and is sanctioned for a particular purpose. The main function of the state is to punish evil (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1-7).

Sola5's Core Value #3 says of this civic realm, it "is for the well-ordering and protection of society; this includes the appropriate punishment of criminals (Rom. 13:1-7)." The state's symbol of authority, as Romans 13 makes clear, is "the sword", clearly a tool for punishing criminals (v. 4). The focus of the state is not the care of souls (as in the church), or both souls and bodies (as in the family), but is focused on the protection of bodies, specifically of the human rights of its citizens.

In Scripture, the entire *modus-operandi* of the church and state stand in stark contrast to one another. As Paul Hartwig writes: "The State has a coercive and forceful function; the Church has a non-coercive and persuasive one." People attend worship services freely and voluntarily; people pay their taxes by necessity, right? In the church 'you ought to' is the motive; but in the State it is 'you must'.

This is why any compelling 'must' commands issued by the State over church affairs are an alien intrusion into the nature of the Church and contrary to how she

¹¹ See many more examples here: <https://www.sonofcarey.com/?p=2727>

functions. If the armed response came to your door and insisted that you should let them in to nurse your children, you would say, “No entry. Please stay outside and guard the property.” Their presence in your home would be a threat, as much as it is a blessing outside. In the same way, the government as a “servant of God for our good” (Rom. 13:4) may warn churches about a possible threat and appeal to them to temporarily cease congregating; but the government must not bring its sword into the church mandating when and how we will worship.

The key parallel text to Romans 13 (which we’ll examine below in Parts 4-5) is 1 Peter 2:13-17:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond slaves of God. Honour all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king.

This passage calls us to godly civil *obedience* based on Christ’s sinless, selfless example of trusting God and submitting to wicked and unjust rulers (1 Peter 2:21-25).¹² *Christians must submit to legitimate rulers giving lawful commands whether they agree or not, or like it or not.* Even if we don’t agree with the amount of taxation, we pay our taxes. Even if we don’t like the speed limits, we follow them.¹³

Yet *unqualified* Christian obedience to government cannot be taught from texts which explicitly limit the boundaries of government authority and the extent of our submission. God Himself clearly restricts the role of government, not giving it unlimited authority: it acts “for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:14). *When rulers reverse that, as often happens, by praising evildoers and punishing those who do right, they violate their delegated, God-given authority and transgress their divinely established boundaries and assigned jurisdiction.*

With the present Covid lockdowns, when governments are trampling over human rights and replacing rule by constitutional, parliamentary law with rule by martial law (emergency regulations) under a dubious and indefinite ‘state of disaster’ (a known tool for tyrants historically; see Part 1 above), it must be admitted this creates a number of ethical dilemmas for citizens, especially God-fearing, law-abiding Christians. When one’s religion, livelihood, education, or human dignity are at stake, believers need great wisdom (and must show great grace in) knowing when, and

¹² See an excellent essay here, *No Cover For Tyrants: 1 Peter 2:13-17 Explained*:

https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00CIDHCXK&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref =cm_sw_r_kb_dp_j-MeGbb0QWYKA

¹³ Last year in our church small groups we did an excellent study by R.C. Sproul (free on-line) on the overall biblical and historic doctrines of civil obedience and civil disobedience:

https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/church_and_state/ James Montgomery Boice also has a helpful, brief summary chapter entitled, “Church and State” (pp. 688-699, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*)

when not, to obey harmful dictates and unjust laws (e.g., lockdowns that destroy livelihoods; forced masking/vaccines, forbidden facial hair, anal swabs, etc.).^{14 15}

We obey our rulers, not for their own sake or just because they say so; no, we submit “for the Lord’s sake” (v. 13), out of obedience to a much higher authority, King Jesus. God has clearly put a hierarchy in place, and we dare not circumvent or reverse that. When an earthly authority clashes with our highest, majestic and supreme heavenly authority, we must disobey Caesar and obey Christ, every time.

We must be whole-Bible Christians and learn from godly examples. The Hebrew midwives were honoured by God when they disobeyed Pharaoh’s command to kill all of the baby boys (Exod. 1). We see Jonathan’s nobility when he refuses to obey his father and kill David (1 Sam. 20). David refused to turn himself in, trusting God’s promise (1 Sam. 19). Daniel kept praying, openly (Dan. 6). His three friends refused to bow (Dan. 3). Peter and John refused to stop preaching (Acts 5). If we can’t obey government “in the Lord,” we shouldn’t obey. Passivity is not a virtue; protest is not always a vice. After all, we are *Protest-ants*.

This means we can make righteous appeals when we see authorities being unjust. We have record of the Apostle Paul twice appealing to his Roman citizenship, especially for the benefit of other believers and the churches he’d planted (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-28).

Paul would be thrilled with the freedoms that Christians today enjoy in countries like South Africa. We are heirs of centuries of constitutional democracy built upon *Lex Rex* (‘Law is King’), instead of the medieval idea of the divine right of kings (see Part 1)¹⁶. We are voting, involved citizens, not mere serfs and vassals. The highest human law of the land in South Africa is not a president, deputy minister, or disaster regulations; it is our Constitution, and to that we can rightly appeal.

It would be foolish and ungrateful for believers not to appreciate all the benefits we’ve received from these Judeo-Christian ideas and the price paid for these freedoms by our forefathers. Surely part of the Church being “salt and light” in society, and “loving our neighbour as ourselves”, would be active participation in a democracy so that we are not responsible for allowing laws that punish good and reward evil to become entrenched (Matt. 5:12-14; 7:12).¹⁷

God is sovereign and Christ can build His Church under the worst of tyrants and fiercest of persecution; but that doesn’t mean the consequences for the Church, missions and human dignity in those lands has not been devastating. Nor does it

¹⁴ See Endnote #4 below for one church’s response to the mask controversy, fully respecting both sides of the debate. To understand why some believe they must disobey masking laws: https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2020/12/the-case-against-masks-presented-by.html?m=1#_ednref4

¹⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-27/china-s-zero-tolerance-covid-approach-now-includes-anal-swabs>

¹⁶ Written by the devout and renowned Scottish pastor, and saturated with biblical references defending the biblical view of limited government and rule of law: <https://www.monergism.com/lex-rex-ebook>. It was said that at the Westminster Assembly, that great original gathering of our Puritan forefathers and heroes, every single member had in hand of copy of Rutherford’s *Lex Rex*.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem’s fine work, *Politics According to the Bible*, grapples with many such questions.

mean that we passively wait for South Africa to become the next North Korea or Venezuela, not doing all that we can to prevent it. It's been rightly said, "All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

So we see from Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 that God has given the government a specific sphere within which to function. It is ordained to punish evil and reward good. Christians are called to submit to the government only in the Lord. Obedience to these Scriptures protects us from both anarchy and tyranny.

PART FOUR

Francis Schaeffer was one of the 20th century's most stalwart defenders of the gospel and an influential Christian author, teacher and apologist.¹⁸ After the catastrophic Roe versus Wade legalisation of abortion in 1973, Schaeffer was deeply burdened over the apathy of the evangelical church in not opposing such murderous, wicked laws. He wrote:

If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the living God. ...And that point is exactly when the early Christians performed their acts of civil disobedience, even when it cost them their lives. ...Acts of State which contradict God's Law are illegitimate and acts of tyranny. Tyranny is ruling without the sanction of God. To resist tyranny is to honour God. ...The bottom line is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty to disobey the State.¹⁹



In this series, we are looking at *two biblical reasons for Christian civil disobedience when earthly authorities clash with our highest allegiance to heavenly authority*:

(1) Christians May Disobey Because of the Three God-ordained Spheres of Authority (family, church, and state).

In other words, outside of their own sphere, rulers have no authority. The state needs no permission from the church or family to perform its tasks (elect officials, go to war, punish crime, etc.). The family needs no permission from the church or state

¹⁸ See here for one of his final and most powerful projects summarizing the last 2,000 years of history in light of a biblical worldview and the Church's role in our increasingly secular, post-Christian age:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6c8EOyAg1U&list=PLBtCqYJcR2R0cOnm_M_ScQZk17UmfH7Xx

¹⁹ p. 130, *Christian Manifesto*; on this, see also these excellent and helpful resources:

<https://www.nlnrac.org/classical/late-medieval-transformations/documents/defense> (the Huguenot classic, *A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants*); Glenn Sunshine, *Slaying Leviathan: Limited Government and Resistance in the Christian Tradition*; Matthew Trewhella, *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates: A Proper Resistance to Tyranny and a Repudiation of Unlimited Obedience to Civil Government*. See also the influence of the past 200 years of pietism in causing Christians to retreat instead of resisting: <https://defytyrants.com/a-brief-history-on-pietism-and-statist-rulers/>

to do its God-given job of raising and caring for the bodies and souls of that household. Speeches from a head of state are not “family meetings”; they are speeches. Likewise, the church needs no permission from the family or state to fulfil its role.

What happens when one sphere swells, expands, overreaches and trespasses into another God-ordained realm? Here’s a sobering example, when the Jews declared to Pilate, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15). That is statism – idolising the state, dethroning the Lord, and exchanging the true God for the false god of civil government.

It is the opposite of Jesus’ famous answer when asked about paying taxes: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). In one brilliant statement, our Lord both legitimizes and limits the role of the State. As Doug Wilson states, “If you were to summarize the essential feature of Christian political thought in one phrase, it would be *limited government*.”²⁰

Because man is fallen and finite, his authority must always be bounded and restricted, never absolute. Only our thrice-holy God is not corrupted by universal power. All human authority (in all three spheres) is limited both vertically and horizontally: limited upwards by the Law of God; limited outwards by the boundaries and jurisdiction of the other two respective spheres, which may not be trespassed.

Paul Hartwig again helps us here our local context:

The State in South Africa (SA) is increasingly encroaching upon the integrity and autonomy of both the family and the Church. Our State wants to regulate practices in nuclear families (such as child-discipline, sexual values, etc.) and coerce the family to comply with its ideologies. The temporary legal banning of Church gatherings is characteristic of this trend of the State to overreach into realms not under its authority. There is much to convince us that our Government considers itself sovereign in regulating the behaviour of its citizens; and there little to gainsay the conclusion that it is fast moving in the direction of state absolutism.

Many statutory principles and laws of the SA government give Christians every reason to question its morality and integrity, including the science it bases its practices on. If we consider our government’s policies on the beginning of human life, natural gender identity, the nature of marriage and its views on sexual ethics, the Christian in SA finds the values of its government opposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Biblical Churches believe that our State’s position on these basic and fundamental matters is destructive to human society, and reveals an ignorance in knowing what is actually good for its citizens. The position of our government on these matters makes any form of State interference in ecclesiastical matters all the more alarming.

²⁰ <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/on-the-lookout-for-a-sane-lesser-magistrate.html>

But you say, ‘The Apostle Paul wrote Romans 13 under wicked Nero, a vicious tyrant; yet Christians were still called to submit and obey.’ Great question, which brings us to our 2nd biblical reason for civil disobedience:

(2) Christians May Disobey Because of a Right Use of Romans 13.

Romans 13:1-7 reads:

Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behaviour, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a servant of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Pay to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; respect to whom respect; honour to whom honour.

Let’s ask *five key questions of Romans 13*, allowing the text to speak for itself²¹:

(a) *Who is writing this text?* Clearly it was penned by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 1:1), the same man who says earlier in this same epistle that for the Lord “we are being put to death all day long...considered as sheep to be slaughtered”, i.e., executed by the state. Romans 13 is written by the same Paul who would be publicly charged as a treasonous, seditious troublemaker and threat to the empire. The same Paul who got arrested countless times and wrote many of his epistle from state prison, in chains for his Lord (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Php. 1:7,13-17; 2 Tim. 1:8,12,16; 2:9, imprisoned “as a criminal”). Clearly then, Paul wasn’t writing Romans 13 thinking of absolute, unconditional submission to government.

(b) *When was Paul writing?* Scholarly consensus is that this is early in Nero’s reign, before his persecutions began.²² Contrast this to the Apostle John’s view of civil government in Revelation 13, writing during Domitian’s fierce persecution (about AD 90). John describes the beastly, demonic, evil and murderous character of pagan government in persecuting Christians (just as Daniel depicts in Dan. 7-8).

A whole-Bible view of politics requires both Romans 13 and Revelation 13 (and the rest of Scripture). On the one hand, when government is in line with God’s will and

²¹ See here for an excellent treatment, *Resistance to Tyrants: Romans 13 and the Christian Duty to Oppose Wicked Rulers*:

https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00925ZP4U&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref_cm_sw_r_kb_dp_VqMeGbMKJBE0Q

²² Nero’s persecution began about AD 64; Paul probably penned Romans around AD 57 (Moo, p. 3). That doesn’t mean Paul was naïve about evil rulers and tyrants, like those that crucified our Lord; but it does imply that Paul, while writing Romans 13, was neither ignoring or condoning Nero’s evil, nor any other injustices.

fulfilling its purpose of rewarding the right, punishing the wrong and not clashing with God's Law, it must be obeyed. But when government rewards evil, punishes the right and requires us to disobey God, it has become a beastly tool of Satan and must be resisted. Since when did Christians start asking the Beast for permission to gather and worship the Lamb?

PART FIVE

G.K. Chesterton once made this astute observation:

It is only by believing in God that we can ever criticize the government. Once abolish God, and the government becomes the God.... Wherever the people do not believe in something beyond the world, they will worship the world. But, above all, they will worship the strongest thing in the world.²³

At present here in South Africa, we are under an indefinite ban on all worship services of any size or location. Yet Scripture commands us not to forsake "our own assembling 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).²⁴ What then must the Christian do?



In this series, we are looking at *two biblical reasons for Christian civil disobedience when earthly authorities clash with our highest allegiance to heavenly authority:*

(1) Christians May Disobey Because of the Three God-ordained spheres of Authority (family, church, and state). (See above.dd)

(2) Christians May Disobey Because of a Right Use of Romans 13.

We're answering *five key questions of Romans 13*, the first two of which we've answered already: (a) Who is writing this text?; (b) When was Paul writing? Now let's tackle the remaining three questions:

(c) *To whom will all rulers give an account?*

Look back at our text and count how many times "God" appears. Six times it is emphasized that HE is the one who establishes governments and uses them as His servants. Every last king and cop will answer to the Almighty. No human authorities are ever absolute, no matter how powerful or terrifying. Ask Nebuchadnezzar what happened when he forgot that, and had to learn about God's supremacy the hard way! (Dan. 4). As the saying goes, 'Rulers who don't fear God will try to be God.'

²³ <https://www.chesterton.org/lecture-65>

²⁴ See my sermon here explaining this further, "Why We Gather": <https://youtu.be/8u8e7Z0FNvQ>

John Gill comments on Romans 13:2, which seems to forbid any resistance to government:

This is not to be understood, as if magistrates were above the laws, and had a lawless power to do as they will without opposition; for they are under the law, and liable to the penalty of it, in case of disobedience, as others; and when they make their own will a law, or exercise a lawless tyrannical power, in defiance of the laws of God, and of the land, to the endangering of the lives, liberties, and properties of subjects, they may be resisted (1 Sam. 14:45). But Romans 13 prohibits resisting magistrates in the right discharge of their office.²⁵

(d) *Why has God appointed them to govern?*

Notice again, just as we saw (Part 3) in 1 Peter 2:14, so also in Romans 13, the text itself contains clear limitation clauses showing the God-ordained boundaries around the government's sphere of authority: "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behaviour; but for evil...a minister of God for your good...an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (vv. 3-4; cf. Ps. 101:8; Prov. 20:8; 29:4). Yes, these are descriptive clauses, not conditional ones; but still they put boundaries upon government authority. (Answering to what extent we submit to abusive authorities is not an easy question, nor the purpose of Paul's teaching in Romans 13:1-7; but this blog series seeks at least to establish some biblical principles as a starting point for the discussion.)

God calls government to a focused, limited role of mainly criminal justice and protection of human rights, not universal parenting in a nanny state. As a friend of mine recently said, "When law-abiding citizens are more afraid of the police than criminals are, government is outside of its God-given role."

As Francis Schaeffer said in applying Romans 13:

The State is to be an agent of justice, to restrain evil by punishing wrongdoers, and to protect the good in society. When the State does the reverse, it has no proper authority. It is then a usurped authority and as such it becomes lawless and is tyranny.²⁶

As pastor Tom Buck sums up well the biblical limitations of government's role:

²⁵ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/romans-13/>; Cf. D. Moo, "all our subordinate 'submissions' must always be measured in relationship to our all-embracing submission to Him. ...Our own sad experience of situations like the Holocaust during WWII suggests that genuine Christian devotion to God must sometimes require *disobedience* of the government. ...Clearly, a willingness to resist the demands of secular rulers, when those conflict with the demand of the God we serve, is part of the 'transformation of life' which Paul speaks about in Rom. 12-15. ...we should refuse to give to government any absolute rights and should evaluate all its demands in the light of the gospel." (pp. 797, 806-10, *Romans*, NICNT) Cf. Schreiner on Rom. 13, "This text is misunderstood if it is taken out of context and used as an absolute word so that Christians uncritically comply with the state no matter what...." (p. 687, *Romans*, BECNT).

²⁶ p. 90, *A Christian Manifesto*

...The government is not responsible to ensure that everyone avoids death as long as possible. The government does not have the right to outlaw pizza, because consuming too much pizza might clog your arteries and result in a heart attack. Or to regulate how much sugar a citizen eats to make sure no one dies from diabetes. Eating too much pizza or drinking too much soda do not infringe upon another person's rights, and so the government should not meddle in these types of actions.

The government only has the authority to make laws that incentivize obedience to God's commands and criminalize disobedience to God's commands within society. ...The government does not have the authority to close the church in the name of protecting life – that's not their job. Government has been established by God to protect rights, not to prevent all illness and death.²⁷

Or as David deBruyn stated in a recent sermon:

...The most dangerous governments are those who think of themselves as pure and righteous, because they see their acts as for the greater good, and are blind to the pain they produce. To be more specific, the more the government takes on the role of omni-protector, the more freedoms will be crushed and extinguished. Modern governments are a far cry from what the Bible charges governments to do: which is simply maintain order by punishing crime or threats to life. That's the biblical role of government as seen in Romans 13.

(e) *Who defines "good" and "evil"?*

Look again at Romans 13:3-4: Three times Paul speaks of "the good", and three times he speaks of "the evil". But who defines and who decides what is "good" or "evil"? Secular society today defines morality by political correctness, the LGBTQ agenda and censorship of all 'hate speech', and by all that is pro-abortion and anti-marriage. In communist countries, "good" is atheism, racism, worship of the state, rejection of all private property, and resulting genocide; "evil" is any opposition to the state or political treason.

But that *cannot* be how God defines morality in Romans 13 or anywhere in His holy Word and His perfect Law. In the very next verses (vv. 8-10), Paul proceeds to show that God's absolute and objective Law defines our ethics, not any manmade subjective or situational standards. From the Garden of Eden, to Mount Sinai, to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, God has made clear that His character and Law are the fixed, universal standard for "good" and "evil" (Exod. 20; Lev. 19; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:17-20).

Therefore, rulers don't create morality; they must conform to it. Rulers don't define good and evil; their job is to reward the good and punish the evil, based on God's standards. As John Knox states, "Kings have not an absolute power in their

²⁷ <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/general-apologetics/revolution-or-obedience-a-response-to-jonathan-leemans-position-regarding-civil-disobedience/>

regiment to do what pleases them; but their power is limited by God's Word. ...Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."²⁸

But of course pagan governments often disregard the divine standard, though God's Law is still inscribed on their hearts and written on their consciences (Rom. 2:14-15). So we submit wherever possible and keep paying our taxes (Rom. 13:6-7); but we are watchful for any infringement on our first allegiance and highest duty of obedience to God's Law. As the famous Magdeburg Confession states, "divine laws necessarily trump human ones".²⁹

The Bible does not teach that you must always obey the government. Let me illustrate: Wives are mandated to submit and "be subject to their husbands in everything", which sounds like absolute language (Eph. 5:22-24). Yet that cannot include obeying a husband who instructs his wife to break God's Law (e.g., be immoral, cheat on taxes, abort a baby, etc.). Children are commanded to "be obedient to your parents in all things", which sounds unconditional (Col. 3:20). Yet that cannot include submitting when dad asks his son to commit a crime or to sin, or when mom asks her daughter to steal or lie. What Scripture teaches is that we always obey government "in the rightful exercise of their authority".³⁰

Whenever a human authority (in home, church or state) asks you to disobey God, at that point their authority is null and void. Likewise, Romans 13 presupposes an authority that is functioning justly, not requiring us to disobey the Word of God in any way. Writes John Calvin, "For earthly princes lay aside their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy to be reckoned among the number of mankind."³¹

In closing, Scripture makes clear that submission to authority is not agreement. We submit "for the Lord's sake" to every human institution, no matter our opinion or preference. Any time a legitimate authority gives a lawful command, like it or not, we must trust God and submit, no matter how irrational or unreasonable it seems.

But whenever we are commanded by an illegitimate authority (out of their biblical sphere) or an unlawful command (against the Law of God), we "must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). *Biblical civil disobedience is required anytime we are commanded to do what God forbids (e.g., Exod. 1; Dan. 3, etc.), or told not to do what God requires (Dan 6; Acts 4-5).*³²

The heart of a Christian is not for maximum obedience to the state and minimum obedience to Christ. Especially in the church sphere, our Lord has given us New Testament epistles packed with dozens of "one another" commands and principles for our church life³³, and our highest priority is to study and obey those divine

²⁸ p. 372 in M. Cassidy, *The Passing Summer*

²⁹ <https://defytyrants.com/magdeburg-book/>

³⁰ p. 146, J. Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT); he continues, "we are compelled to take account of exceptions to the absolute terms in which an obligation is affirmed (e.g., Acts 4-5)" (p. 149).

³¹ Commentary on Daniel Lecture XXX, Daniel 6:32

³² See also here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/does-romans-13-prohibit-all-civil-disobedience> And here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/civil-disobedience.html>

³³ <https://www.challies.com/articles/one-another-the-bible-community/>

regulations to please Christ our Lord and King, our Head, Shepherd and Ruler of His Church, whose glad slaves we are, who bought us with His own blood.

We dare not have a view of near-absolute submission to the State that effectively rules out any underground church, leaving only the registered churches that meet Caesar's approval and boast of their full compliance.³⁴

David deBruyn drives this home to our present situation here in South Africa:

...The difficulty we are going to face in the coming months, and maybe even years, is that as wave after wave of the virus comes our way, the government may keep banning religious gatherings...We cannot live through another year where we are tossed to and fro by every announcement coming from Pretoria. At least one thing needs to remain certain in our lives, and that is our covenant with Christ and His people. We need the rock-solid pillar of the church, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), not the shifting sands of whatever happens with Covid-19.

FURTHER RESOURCES

1. The underground, Confessing Church in Nazi Germany in the 1930s (led by men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred) took a bold stand in their **Barmen Declaration**:

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day. ... We reject the false doctrine that...the Church could, and could have permission to give itself or allow itself to be given special leaders [Führer; political] vested with ruling authority. ... We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission [biblical role] the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well.

[https://www.spucc.org/sites/default/files/BARMEN%20DECLARATION%20UC C.pdf](https://www.spucc.org/sites/default/files/BARMEN%20DECLARATION%20UC%20C.pdf)

2. To read about an unsung Christian **hero of civil disobedience**, get *One Woman Against the Reich: The True Story of a Mother's Struggle to Keep Her Family Faithful to God in a World Gone Mad*, by H.W. Ziefle (Kregel, 2003). A **Christian movie**, *The Printing*, also vividly shows the tempting comforts and security of the registered/state church in the former Soviet Union, compared to the price paid by the underground church:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B01JNXOZIM/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r

3. Common question and good answer from Phil Johnson (on behalf of the elders at Grace Community Church):

³⁴ Read this powerful testimony from an imprisoned Chinese pastor:

<https://www.chinapartnership.org/blog/2018/12/my-declaration-of-faithful-disobedience>

“Are the spheres of church and state as distinct as the statement implies? Doesn't the church submit to government fire codes and zoning restrictions? If so, why not likewise acquiesce to these public health restrictions?”

Answer: While it is true that the church is subject to fire codes and zoning restrictions, those are routine civil, not spiritual, matters, so the state exercises legitimate authority enforcing them. But the government's authority in civil matters associated with the church does not give it authority in spiritual matters, which are the lifeblood of the church. Attendance caps, singing bans, and distancing requirements (especially those that are established arbitrarily and by executive fiat) have the effect of suppressing or eliminating the congregational worship that is an essential element of church life. Therefore such orders fall outside the jurisdiction of civil authorities.

<http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2020/08/questions-we-get-about-gcc-elders.html>)

4. On civil disobedience from **Calvin's Institutes**:

...But in that obedience which we hold to be due to the commands of rulers, we must always make the exception, nay, must be particularly careful that it is not incompatible with obedience to Him to whose will the wishes of all kings should be subject, to whose decrees their commands must yield, to whose majesty their sceptres must bow. And, indeed, how preposterous were it, in pleasing men, to incur the offence of Him for whose sake you obey men! The Lord, therefore, is King of kings. When he opens his sacred mouth, he alone is to be heard, instead of all and above all. We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us not pay the least regard to it, nor be moved by all the dignity which they possess as magistrates—a dignity to which no injury is done when it is subordinated to the special and truly supreme power of God.

(<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.xxi.html>)

5. The **Scottish Covenanters** were some of church history's finest examples of godly protest. One of their pioneers was saintly old Andrew Melville, who was jailed in the Tower of London for confronting King James with these words in 1611 (same year as the KJV was published):

There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: There is King James, the head of the Commonwealth, and there is King Jesus, the Head of the Kirk, whose subject King James is, and of whose kingdom he is not the head, nor a lord, but a member.

Later, in 1660 the Covenanters signed their National Covenant, some signing in their own blood. Historian S.M. Houghton tells of how they were determined to: *resist to the death the claims of the king and his minions to override the Crown Rights of the Redeemer in His Kirk (King Jesus). Their National Covenant gives high honour to the eternal God and His most holy Word; demands the faithful preaching of that Word, the due and right ministrations of the sacraments.... The subscribers further say that they fear neither 'the foul aspersions of rebellion, combination, or what else our adversaries from their*

craft and malice would put upon us, seeing what we do is so well warranted, and ariseth from an unfeigned desire to maintain the true worship of God, the majesty of our king, and the peace of the kingdom, for the common happiness of ourselves and our posterity'. They pledge themselves as in the sight of God to 'be good examples to others of all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty we owe to God and man'.

6. C.H. Spurgeon said this about Daniel's brave three friends who would not obey King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3):

...They might have said, 'It is only for once, and not for long. Ten minutes or so, once in a lifetime, to please the king; such a trivial act cannot make any difference; at any rate, it is not enough to brave the fiery furnace for. ...It would be ridiculous to throw away our lives for such a trifle. ...In the supreme hour many fail, because the trial is seemingly so small.'

They mean to stand for God; but this is scarcely the right time; they will wait, and choose a more worthy occasion, when something really heroic can be attempted. Were they to stand for such a little thing, the world would laugh with derision at such a straining out of a gnat.

So Adam eats the apple; Esau the pottage; and the one temptation, unresisted, issues in life-long loss. Not even for a few minutes in a lifetime would these three brave men deny their God. May their stubborn faith be ours!

7. An **"Elder's Statement On the Non-Enforcement of Masks"** (one church's attempt biblically to guide the flock through this volatile issue)

We as elders have decided it is not our place to enforce the state's current mask-wearing regulations (when the church gathers), for the following biblical reasons:

(1) Our risen Lord is Head of the Church, not Caesar; Christ rules us through His Word (Acts 5:29; Mark 12:17). The New Testament has much to say about how we gather for corporate worship and about our communal life together. Christ has not given us authority as church leaders to enforce masks, which goes "beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). Unlike other regulations, masks can be dehumanising, can inhibit our obedience to Christ in singing and fellowship, in recognising, greeting and caring for one another; masks can also hinder our welcoming of visitors, learning their names, and being able to hear them (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19-20; 2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 14; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:10).

(2) In the three God-given spheres of authority, we see personal health decisions as the duty of the family sphere, not the church (Gen. 18:19; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8).

(3) Masks are what Romans 14 is all about – debatable matters of conscience, where Christian love and liberty must prevail. Listen to Core Value #22 in our Sola5 'Core Values', on Liberty of Conscience:

God in Christ has purchased the liberty of believers, freeing them from the guilt of sin, God's wrath, unbiblical traditions and regulations of men, Satan and the fear of death (Gal 5:1; Col 2:8–23; Heb 2:14–15):

- Therefore we affirm that believers are bound in their consciences only to God and his Word, not to the impositions of men and of Satan (Rom 14:1–15:4). We further affirm that Christian liberty is nothing but freedom to serve God within the boundaries that God himself has set (Rom 6:8–22).
- We deny that Christian liberty gives licence to sin of any kind (Rom 6:1–7). We further deny that any church or its leaders have a right to expect obedience from members when they (as leaders) teach things that are contrary or additional to God's Word (Matt 15:1–9; Col 2:20–23).

(4) Scripture requires us to believe the best about one another's motives, treating others the way we would want to be treated (1 Cor. 13:7; Matt. 7:12). Therefore:

a. When you see a brother/sister at church wearing a mask, you should assume: They are doing this "for the sake of conscience" before the Lord and out of Christian love (Rom. 14). (Perhaps out of medical or legal concerns for themselves or others, or for other good and godly reasons.)

b. When you see a brother/sister not wearing a mask, you should assume: They are doing this "for the sake of conscience" before the Lord and out of Christian love. (Perhaps out of personal or medical concerns, or other good and godly reasons.)

"Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves," Rom. 14:22 (another beatitude). Both the masked & the unmasked can still be law-abiding citizens, trusting God, loving their neighbour, taking Covid seriously and caring for the vulnerable – just in different ways. Scripture, not society, defines those virtues for us.

This is why we as elders believe it is not our place to require masks but to defend your true Christian liberty to choose what you believe is best. Whenever you have any questions or concerns, please speak to us as elders (as you've been doing already). Let's keep praying and striving for our unity as one family and body in Christ, as a witness to a watching world.