

The Christian Obligation to the Earthly Government

Whether or not a Christian should obey the government is becoming a much more relevant question these days.

With increased government overreach and control, it is a good time to examine what the Bible says about listening to the government.

The Bible says that we should obey the government, as long as those in authority are not violating the laws of God. If the government passes laws that are opposed to God's law, we are not required by God to obey them.

The Bible makes it clear that Christians should obey the laws of the land, as long as those laws don't violate God's law, which is higher. God is the ultimate and final authority. He should be obeyed at all costs.

Titus 3:1-2 **Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. [They should be obedient](#), always ready to do what is good.** They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

Rulers of the land are supposed to be a terror to evil and praise those who do good. When we obey authorities in what is right, we honor God. But when those in authority become workers of evil, we are not supposed to submit to their ways that are contrary to God. Rulers of the land are supposed to punish evildoers, not empower them.

When rulers and those in authority agree with and uphold the laws of God, they become ministers of God and we are instructed to obey them, showing that our conduct is upright and honorable. A Christian should not suffer because of their bad behavior, but should be in subjection to the Godly laws of the land that are in place to hold back evil.

When a government has righteous leaders, they make righteous laws that keep things in order. Crimes are punished. Those who do wrong to their neighbor suffer the consequences. These types of laws are in line with God's Word and should be followed by Christians. Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin [is] a reproach to any people.

Not only does the Bible tell us when to obey the government, but the Word of God also commands us to honor and pray for our leaders.

1 Peter 2:13-17 **For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is God's will that your honorable lives [should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you](#).** For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

Romans 13:1-2 **Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.** So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished.

Romans 13:3-7 **For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:** For he is the

minister of God to thee for good. **But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain:** for he is the minister of God, **a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.** Wherefore ye must needs **be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.** For because of this **you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.**

What Does the Bible Say About Obeying Unjust Laws?

There are certain times where civil disobedience is called for. When obeying a law of the land would cause you to disobey God's law, then you must make the choice to obey God rather than man.

An example of this in the Bible is found in Acts 4 and 5. Peter and John were threatened and commanded by those in authority not to preach in the Name of Jesus.

But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4: 17-20

Peter and John chose to obey God rather than man. They made a decision to disobey the law of the land in order to obey God. Any man-made law that requires us to disobey our God should be civilly disobeyed.

Again in Acts 5, Peter and the other apostles declared that it was right to obey God over man.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5: 27-29

In Hebrews 10, the Bible commands Christians to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25

This is a command from God through His written Word. If the government creates a law forbidding the Church from assembling ourselves together, then we must make the decision to obey God rather than man.

If the government creates laws that would hinder us from loving our neighbor, or from healing the sick, or from any other command of God, we must be bold enough to obey God rather than man despite the consequences. This requires great boldness and a commitment to honor God no matter what.

1 Peter 2:18-21 You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. **Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.** For **God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair**

treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

Ephesians 6:5-6 **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ.** Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart.

Even the angels do not speak evil of dignitaries! As a follower of Christ, there should never be an instance where we speak evil of our leaders. In fact, we are commanded to speak evil of no one. Of course there are going to be leaders that we don't agree with, but we are told to pray for them.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2: 1-4

As believers we must do what is pleasing to the Lord. We must continue to respect and obey authority. We must not only obey when we agree with things. Though sometimes it may seem hard we must obey when things seem unfair.

Be a good example for others and even [through hard times](#) serve the Lord with all your heart by submitting to authority.

Remember that we are to be the light of the world and there is no power, except that which God allows.

Christian quotes about authority

“Government is not mere advice; it is authority, with power to enforce its laws.” – George Washington

“Authority exercised with humility, and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.” – C.S. Lewis

“The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.” – John Stott

“Our first remark on this subject is that the ministry is an office, and not merely a work. Our second remark is, that the office is of divine appointment, not merely in the sense in which the civil powers are ordained of God, but in the sense that ministers derive their authority from Christ, and not from the people.” Charles Hodge

“Men of authority and influence may promote good morals. Let them in their several stations encourage virtue. Let them favor and take part in any plans which may be formed for the advancement of morality.” Williams Wilberforce

“Ultimately all authority on earth must serve only the authority of Jesus Christ over humankind.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“His authority on earth allows us to dare to go to all the nations. His authority in heaven gives us our only hope of success. And His presence with us leaves us with no other choice.” John Stott

“Kingdom Authority is the God-given mandate of Christians to exercise control over the world in the name of Jesus and under His oversight.” Adrian Rogers

“Authentic Christian Preaching carries a note of authority and a demand for decisions not found elsewhere in society.” Albert Mohler

Ellen G. White

The world is becoming more and more lawless. The churches are united in their efforts to restrict religious liberty. What are we as a people doing in this crisis? Are we purifying our souls by obedience to Christ's words? Are we humbling our hearts before God and confessing our sins? Are we seeking with earnestness and contrition of soul Him who is the source of our strength? Are we claiming the promises, believing that Jesus pardons our transgressions and forgives our sins? Are we educating ourselves to overcome all temptation to murmur and complain? Ever we need to manifest kindness and true courtesy. We may have to plead most earnestly before legislative councils for the right to exercise independent judgment, to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience. Thus in His Providence God has designed that the claims of His holy law shall be brought before men in the highest authority. But as we do all we can as men and women who are not ignorant of Satan's devices, we are to manifest no bitterness of feeling. Constantly we are to offer prayer for divine aid. It is God alone who can hold the four winds until the angels shall seal the servants of God in their foreheads.--Letter 5, 1883, pp. 1, 4. (To "Dear Brethren," November, 1883.)

I have been shown that from the first rebellion Satan was working to this end, to exalt his own power in contradiction to God's law and God's power. He does this in exalting Sunday observance, and anything that shall by this people go forth as their voice, to respect the idol sabbath, would it not dishonor God and confuse minds and place them where they will be deceived by Satan's devices? Anything we may do that lifts up the spurious to take the place of the true and genuine Sabbath, is disloyal to God and we must move very carefully lest we exalt the decisions of the man of sin. We are not to be found in a neutral position on this matter of so great consequence. The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus must be from conviction of duty inscribed on our banners.--Ms 6, 1889, p. 12. (Untitled, November 4, 1889.)

The persecution of two of our brethren of one of the neighboring churches, and the sentence requiring them to pay a fine or be placed in the stocks, has created such indignation in the public mind that the people are ready to hear, and are calling for the reasons of our faith. This persecution has resulted for the truth rather than against it. Our brethren refused to pay the fine, and the alternative was the stocks, but the authorities have no such instruments of torture. They forced one brother to pay the fine, by seizing upon his horse and cart, leaving him no chance to get home, so he had to hand over the money. The other brother has no property they can attach, and refuses to pay the fine; so here the matter stands.--Letter 40b, 1894, p. 2. (To C. H. Jones, May 14, 1894.)

The commandment-keeping people of God will ere long be placed in a most trying position; but all those who have walked in the light, and have diffused the light, will realize that God

interposes in their behalf. When everything looks most forbidding, then the Lord will reveal His power to His faithful ones. When the nation for which God has worked in such a marvelous manner, and over which He has spread the shield of Omnipotence, abandons Protestant principles, and through its legislature gives countenance and support to Romanism in limiting religious liberty, then God will work in His own power for His people who are true. The tyranny of Rome will be exercised, but Christ is our refuge.--Letter 61, 1895, pp. 11, 12. (To O. A. Olsen, February 2, 1895.)

You will say you must have your holidays just the same as other people do. You can say these holidays are appointed to you; men have a right to spend their time as they please. Light was given to me when they were hunting for the school. At first I thought it must be by the cities, but again the cloud was rolled back and it was shown how our cities were and what they will be, and the whole was presented to me, that we should get a proper distance from the city, that we should have nature around us and establish our school there so that the students would not be bound about with holidays, for they might feel disloyal if they did not have their holidays. {2SAT 127.2}

Then with regard to the Sunday question. I read in the paper of one man who was one hour late closing his store and he had to pay a fine for it. Now, how does God look upon it? Why, we have got to act as men and women that have minds and souls and that are under obedience to God. Now, if they should come here and say you must close up your work and your presses on Sunday, I would not say to you to keep your presses going, because the conflict does not come between you and your God. When they go a little farther and say you must keep Sunday and you shall not observe Saturday, then everyone that took the position would have the mark of the beast. {2SAT 127.3}

If the authorities should say, "Don't carry on work here on Sunday"--and we know what they will do-- there is plenty you can do. You can go on missionary work and make that a day in which you will see what you can accomplish in the work of drawing souls to Jesus Christ, for God does not want us to gratify the devil by defying the powers. You know, when Peter asked Christ about paying tribute, He said, "Are not all the children free?" but, said He, lest He should offend them, "do you go down to the sea and the first fish that you take up, open its mouth and do you take that piece of money and do you pay for yourself, Peter, and for Me." {2SAT 127.4}

Then there are other things that they may draw the line on, but we are not ready for the line to be drawn here in regard to the Sunday law. You just go to work, every one of you, to disappoint the devil and see how much you can do, how many souls you can bring into the truth. {2SAT 127.5}

Question: Is it wrong for our brethren to work out their fines? {SpM 25.6}

"Christ, the King of Glory, carried the cross upon which He was about to be crucified. The people had not the slightest semblance of right to inflict this upon Him, but He did not refuse to submit. Christ suffered and died for us. Shall we refuse to be partaker of His sufferings? Let the servants pay tribute as the Master did, lest others be offended. {SpM 25.7}

"When brought before courts, we are to give up our rights, unless by so doing we are brought into collision with God. We are not pleading for our right, but for God's right to our service. Instead of resisting the penalties imposed unjustly upon us, it would be better to take heed to the Saviour's word, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say into

you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come." Mrs. E. G. White {SpM 26.1}

We should not work in a manner that will mark us out as seeming to advocate treason. We should weed out from our writings and utterances every expression that, taken by itself, could be so misrepresented as to make it appear antagonistic to law and order. Everything should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as encouraging disloyalty to our country and its laws. We are not required to defy authorities. There will come a time when, because of our advocacy of Bible truth, we shall be treated as traitors; but let not this time be hastened by unadvised movements that stir up animosity and strife. {6T 394.2}

"I have given you the light which has been presented to me. If followed, it will change the course of many, and will make them wise, cautious teachers. Refraining from work on Sunday is not receiving the mark of the beast: and where this will advance the interests of the work, it should be done. We should not go out of our way to work on Sunday. {SpM 22.3}

"After the Sabbath has been sacredly observed, in places where the opposition is so strong as to arouse persecution if work is done on Sunday, let our brethren make that day an occasion to do genuine missionary work. Let them visit the sick and the poor, ministering to their wants, and they will find favorable opportunities to open the Scriptures to individuals and to families. Thus most profitable work can be done for the Master. When those who hear and see the light on the Sabbath take their stand upon the truth to keep God's holy day, difficulties will arise, for efforts will be brought to bear against them to compel men and women to transgress the law of God. Here they must stand firm, that they will not violate the law of God, and if the opposition and persecution is determinedly kept up, let them heed the words of Christ, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another; for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come." {SpM 22.4}

"The time has not yet come for us to work as though there were no prejudice. Christ said, "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." If you see that by doing certain things which you have a perfect right to do, you hinder the work of the truth, refrain from doing those things. Do nothing that will close the minds of others against the truth. There is a world to save, and we gain nothing by cutting loose from those we are trying to help. All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient. We have no right to do anything that will obstruct the light which is shining from heaven; yet by a wrong course of action we may imperil the work, and close the door which God has opened for the entrance of the Truth. The final issue of the Sabbath question has not yet come, and by imprudent action we may bring on a crisis before the time. You may have all the truth, but you need not let it all flash at once upon minds, lest it become darkness to them. Even Christ said to His disciples, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now." We must not go into a place, open our satchel, show all we have, and tell everything we know at once. We must work cautiously, presenting the truth by degrees, as the hearers can bear it, and keeping close to the Lord. {SpM 22.5}

If we counsel them not to respect the idol Sabbath exalted to take the place of the Sabbath of the Lord our God, then instruct them in this matter in a quiet way and encourage no defying of the law powers in words or actions unless called to do this for the honor of God to vindicate His downtrodden law. Let there be no unnecessary act of arousing the combative spirit or passions of opponents. There is a self-deluded enthusiasm in this, bringing in an elevation of Sunday that it will be difficult to handle because "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. {1888 476.2}

"From the light that has been given me, I see that we should fear lest rulers take their position against our work. If they do this, they will act like the enemy of all good. Every opportunity to become acquainted with these men should be embraced: but we should do nothing that will produce anything like prejudice. It means a great deal to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We have so much determination in us that often we do things unguardedly and rashly. We must appear before these men as trying to help others, working on the lines of the Christian help work. As they see the good work we do in these lines, their prejudice in a measure will be removed; their hearts will be opened to the truth. Do not present the Sabbath abruptly: present Christ. Should they begin to oppose you, saying, "Oh, he is a Seventh-day Adventist, 'lift up Christ higher, and still higher.'" {SpM 25.1}

While we were living at Cooranbong, where the Avondale school is established, the question of amusements came up for consideration. "What shall we do to provide for the amusement of our students?" the faculty inquired. We talked matters over together, and then I came before the students and said to them: {CT 549.2}

"We can occupy our minds and our time profitably without trying to devise methods for amusing ourselves. Instead of spending time in playing the games that so many students play, strive to do something for the Master." {CT 549.3}

"The very best course for you to pursue is to engage in missionary work for the people of the neighborhood and in the nearby settlements. Whenever you are listening to an interesting discourse, take notes and mark down the passages that the minister uses, so that you can review the subject carefully. Then after faithful study you will soon be able to give a synopsis of the discourses, in the form of Bible readings, to some who do not come to our meetings." {CT 549.4}

The older students decided to follow this suggestion. They had evening meetings for studying the Scriptures together. They worked first of all for one another, and as a result of the Bible studies among themselves, a number of the unconverted were won to the truth. And the effort in behalf of the neighbors was a blessing not only to themselves, but to those for whom they labored. {CT 550.1}

Those who went out to work for the neighbors were instructed to report any case of sickness they might find; and those who had had training in giving treatment to the sick were encouraged to use their knowledge in a practical way. To work for the Master came to be regarded as Christlike recreation. {CT 550.2}

After a time the Sunday labor question came up for consideration. It seemed as if the lines were soon to be drawn so tightly about us that we should not be able to work on Sunday. Our school was situated in the heart of the woods, far from any village or railway station. No one was living near enough to be disturbed in any way by anything we might do. Nevertheless we were watched. The officers were urged to observe what we were doing on the school premises; and they did come, but they did not appear to notice those who were at work. Their confidence and respect for our people had been so won by the work we had done for the sick in that community that they did not wish to interfere with our harmless labor on Sunday. {CT 550.3}

At another time when our brethren were threatened with persecution and were questioning in regard to what they should do, I gave the same advice that I had given in answer to the question concerning the use of Sunday for games. I said, "Employ Sunday in doing missionary

work for God. Teachers, go with your students. Take them to the homes of the people, near and far, and teach them how to talk in a way to do good. Let the people know that you are interested in their souls' salvation." The blessing of God rested upon the students as they diligently searched the Scriptures in order to learn how to present the truths of the word in such a way that these truths would be received with favor. {CT 551.1}

Let the teachers in our schools devote Sunday to missionary effort. Let them take the students with them to hold meetings for those who know not the truth. Sunday can be used for carrying forward various lines of work that will accomplish much for the Lord. On this day house-to-house work can be done. Open-air meetings and cottage meetings can be held. Make these meetings intensely interesting. Sing genuine revival hymns, and speak with power and assurance of the Saviour's love. Speak on temperance and on true religious experience. You will thus learn much about how to work, and will reach many hearts. {CT 551.2}

The people of God will recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and will teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, the word of God must be recognized as above all human legislation. "Thus saith the Lord" is not to be set aside for Thus saith the church or the state. The crown of Christ is to be uplifted above the diadems of earthly potentates. {6T 402.1}

The time will come when unguarded expressions of a denunciatory character, that have been carelessly spoken or written by our brethren, will be used by our enemies to condemn us. These will not be used merely to condemn those who made the statements, but will be charged upon the whole body of Adventists. Our accusers will say that on such and such a day one of our responsible men said thus and so against the administration of the laws of this government. Many will be astonished to see how many things have been cherished and remembered that will give point to the arguments of our adversaries. Many will be surprised to hear their own words strained into a meaning that they did not intend them to have. Then let our workers be careful to speak guardedly at all times and under all circumstances. Let all beware lest by reckless expressions they bring on a time of trouble before the great crisis which is to try men's souls. {CW 69.1}

Sunday Laws in Australia--We are having interesting times for all in Australia. The pressure of the Sunday law has come and is coming. It has been ordered that all stores shall be closed on Sunday, and this is being rigidly enforced. The government is trying to have God acknowledged in the constitution. Our people are making just as vigorous a stand as possible that it shall not be. They have been securing names to a petition to this effect. We can see that that which we have been talking about for the last thirty-five years--this law causing the Sunday to be exalted and making human inventions take the place of God's holy day--is now being fulfilled. There is much excitement now in regard to these matters. {10MR 275.2}

Sanitarium, California, August 17, 1902: Dear Brother: I will try to answer your question as to what you should do in the case of Sunday laws being enforced. The light given me by the Lord at a time when we were expecting just such a crisis as you seem to be approaching, was that when the people were moved by a power from beneath to enforce Sunday observance, Seventh-day Adventists were to show their wisdom by refraining from their ordinary work on that day, devoting it to missionary effort. {9T 232.2}

Exhortations

Ephesians 5:21 ESV

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

John 18:36 ESV

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

Philippians 3:20 ESV

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 6:12 ESV

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

John 19:10-11 ESV

So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Daniel 2:21 ESV

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

Reminder

Ephesians 1:19-21 I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come.

Be a good example

1 Timothy 4:12 Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for other believers in your speech, behavior, love, faithfulness, and purity.

1 Peter 5:5-6 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

God bless

Sami Wilberforce