

ROMANS 13:2 MUST CAESAR ALWAYS BE OBEYED?

“Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.”¹

The Book of Judges concludes on a gloomy note. The last verse of the book reads, “In those days there was no king in Israel.” Then, this dark assessment is appended “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [JUDGES 21:25]. Tragically, the verse describes anarchy in high dudgeon. The author describes an ungoverned, and what is worse still, an ungovernable, society. Paul, in our text, is teaching us that the state is God’s provision for avoiding anarchy; and thus, it is good.

The **FIRST VERSE** of **ROMANS 13** instructs us that we who are Christians are responsible to obey the governing authorities; the following two verses provide reasons why we should obey, while at the same time defining the role of government. If we fail to be subject to the governing authorities, we are disobedient to God, and He will punish us [VERSE TWO]. However, the Apostle also cautions us that disobedience to government will lead to punishment meted out by the government itself.

In the message for this day, I am focused on the **SECOND VERSE** of this chapter, “Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.” This particular statement raises significant questions for those of us who think deeply concerning our role in the particular society wherein God has placed us. Thoughtful believers are compelled to ask whether there exist conditions which would negate this command. In other words, is this teaching absolute? Can we imagine conditions which would make rebellion against the existing authorities justified? What if a government is tyrannical? Suppose the state violates human rights? Where are the limits of obedience for us as Christians? Must Caesar always be obeyed?

JESUS ADDRESSES GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY — Jesus addressed the issue of the authority of the state on at least two occasions. One of those occasions was examined in a previous message. Jesus had been brought before Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea. Pilate appeared agitated by the fact that the Master neither grovelled before him nor attempted to mount a vigorous defence for Himself. The procurator asked Jesus whether He was aware of the authority over the life of individuals that was held by the state. The Master appears to have startled Pilate with His reply, “You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above” [JOHN 19:11].

Jesus, showing respect for the position Pilate occupied and showing respect even for the government represented, nevertheless held Pilate accountable for sin. The Master acknowledged that Pilate did indeed possess authority; but we saw that it was a delegated authority. Since governmental authority Pilate wielded was given by God, Pilate was responsible to God for how he used that authority. With these words, Jesus lays the groundwork for the limits of the authority wielded by the state. The authority of the state is delegated authority, and representatives of government must ultimately answer to God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Another incident demonstrates Jesus' view of state-church relationship. Various groups were testing Him, seeking any flaw in either His teaching or His character. The Pharisees were the first to attempt to trick Jesus into stumbling over his words. Note how the account begins. "The Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His talk. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians" [MATTHEW 22:15, 16a].

The Pharisees and the Herodians were bitter enemies. The Pharisees were Jewish patriots; they detested the secularisation of society which resulted from Greek rule in the previous centuries, just as they resented the current Roman rule. The Herodians were pragmatists. They sought to adopt not only the social trappings of the Greeks and Romans, but they also endeavoured to introduce Greek political and cultural thought to the whole of Judean society. Mutual hatred of Jesus united the two disparate groups in a singular vile plot. Since they could not trip Him up with a theological question, they would manoeuvre Him into making a political misstep.

"Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not" [MATTHEW 22:17]? They thought the question foolproof; surely they could trap Jesus either into approving the Roman occupation or into advocating secession. If He approved of paying taxes, they could discredit Him as a collaborator. If He disapproved of paying taxes, they could denounce Him to Roman authorities as subversive. It seemed to them that Jesus was firmly impaled on the horns of a dilemma.

Jesus asked for a coin, "and they brought Him a denarius" [MATTHEW 22:19b]. Likely holding the coin so they could easily see it, Jesus asked whose portrait and whose inscription was on the coin. The obvious answer was quickly forthcoming, "Caesar's" [MATTHEW 22:21a]. To this expected response, Jesus responded with what has become one of His best-known statements of responsibility to the state. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" [MATTHEW 22:21]. In saying this, Jesus lays the foundation for the precise teaching Paul provides in ROMANS 13:7. "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed."

The denarius Jesus held had Caesar's picture imprinted on it. We could certainly draw the conclusion that Caesar was infatuated with money since he put his picture on it. Jesus was saying, "If Caesar wants this stuff, give it to him. However, bear in mind that the imprint of God is on your soul and you have a responsibility to Him also." There was great hypocrisy in the question posed to the Master on that day, for the Herodians and the Pharisees did enjoy numerous benefits purchased with Roman taxes. If they truly thought that all taxes were onerous and odious, they need to cease accepting the benefits.

OPTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT — We are considering issues surrounding the authority of the state and the limits of Christian compliance with the state's authority. To the brilliant mind of Dr. James Montgomery Boice, Jesus' words about taxes suggested four options for Christians responding to the state.² For the Christian, God may be sole authority, denying any role for Caesar. Opposed to that view, Caesar alone may be the sole authority, with the authority of God denied. God and Caesar may share authority with Caesar in the dominant position. Or God and Caesar may share authority with God in the dominant position. Each of these options needs to be examined in turn.

² James Montgomery Boice, **Romans: Volume 4, The New Humanity, Romans 12-16** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995) 649-50

The first option is that *God alone is the Christian's authority*. During various periods of history, some Christians have adopted this view, especially when the state had become corrupt or oppressively abusive. In the ancient church, some individuals isolated themselves in desert places. They became hermits, separating themselves from all social contacts in order to permit themselves to focus on God and His will.

Perhaps you think that only anchorites or eremites associated with ancient monastic orders practised such religious seclusion. You would be wrong if that were your conclusion. Monasticism is the practical approach of far too many evangelical Christians. When we separate ourselves from contemporary culture, refuse to participate in the electoral process, isolate ourselves so that we have only Christian friends or refuse to work for anyone other than a Christian employer, we effectively become monastics.

The second option proposed by Dr. Boice presents *Caesar alone as our authority*. Certainly, the more secular members of society qualify as holding this particular view. I dare say that the majority of our parliamentarians hold this view, and perhaps even the majority of the members of our various provincial legislative bodies as well as civic politicians. The Jewish leadership during Christ's trial chose this way, you will recall. When presented with the opportunity to declare themselves for or against God, they cried out, "We have no king but Caesar" [JOHN 19:15]. Tragically, there are professing Christians who choose this option, either through neglect or out of convenience.

Of the options presented, this is without doubt the most dangerous, for there are no checks on the authority of the state. There is nothing to restrain the power of the state. Though the American State has checks and balances built in, the checks or balances for the Canadian State are less well defined. The courts seem unbound by the will of Parliament, and Parliament seems often to serve essentially as a dictatorial power under the usual majority governments. There is a check on the untrammelled power of Parliament as the people are permitted to vote from time-to-time, but it is a tenuous check, at best. The Governor General of Canada, and the Lieutenant Governor of the various provincial legislatures, can serve to hold Parliament and the legislatures in check in an emergency, but these checks are seldom employed.

The Psalmist warns that human rulers conspire against God; tragically, human governors do so with astounding regularity [cf. PSALM 2:1-3]. Should a society forsake God, the people are left at the mercy of the governors. Each form of government has a guiding principle. The guiding principle of monarchy is honour. Aristocracy holds as its guiding principle, moderation. The guiding principle of despotism is fear. For democracy, whether republican democracy or parliamentary democracy, the guiding principle is, of necessity, virtue or what is good. Canada is a parliamentary democracy; therefore, for democracy to succeed, the guiding principle must be virtue or goodness.

In a previous message, we defined "good" as that which is pleasing to God. Should the people of Canada fail to be virtuous, society must soon degenerate into a corrupt system where people misuse the power of government for their own narrow ends. I suggest that in no small measure, that is precisely what we are witnessing in this day. Whereas Canada once practised government which honoured majority rights whilst guarding minorities, today our nation exalts individual rights at the expense of virtue. Increasingly, Canada is becoming a nation of multiple enclaves, each shouting loudly that its rights are greater than those of all others. There is no fixed standard of righteousness; virtue has become whatever the loudest voice decides it shall be.

The third option proposed by Dr. Boice was that *the authority of God and Caesar are recognised, but Caesar is dominant*. This is the option claimed by many people, though it is a cowardly option. The reason I say it is a cowardly option is that if the authority of God is claimed at all, it must be the authority of One who is supreme.

I recall an incident which occurred during a deacons' meeting at a church in New Westminster. The chairman of the deacons asserted that the constitution of the church was superior to the Word of God. His justification for this outrageous claim was that we were a Canadian church and therefore required to obey the laws of Canada. I was astonished that when challenged, the remainder of the board agreed with him in this. With this position clarified, I said, "Gentlemen, I owe you an apology. I have treated you as mature men of faith. Now, I see that you are nothing but spiritual imbeciles."

Pilate, the great pragmatist, adopted this position. He knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges levelled against Him by the Jewish leaders. The Roman governor declared Jesus innocent and even tried to free Him; but He feared Caesar more than he feared righteous God. When the Jewish leaders saw that Pilate was considering freeing Jesus, they confronted him, saying, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" [JOHN 19:12]. Pilate feared Caesar. More than anything in the whole world, he wanted to be Caesar's friend; thus, he condemned the sinless Son of God. For the sake of expedience, he was willing to sacrifice all that was right.

The irony of Pilate's cowardice is that he did not receive Caesar's friendship. A few years later, Pilate was removed from office by Vitellius, the proconsul of Syria and ordered to stand trial before Tiberius. The journey to Rome was extended, and Tiberius died before Pilate arrived in Rome; thus, he was spared a trial. Nevertheless, the common account is that Pilate was banished to Gaul by Caligula. There, the disgraced governor is reported to have committed suicide.³

I wonder if tacitly, many evangelical leaders do not hold this view of Caesar's dominance. During a Biennial Assembly of a Canadian Baptist group, I was charged by the congregation I then pastored to present a resolution on behalf of the church. It was a request for the denomination to hold accredited ministers and those licensed by the denomination accountable to a biblical standard. The leadership of the denomination engineered a move to refer the proposed resolution to the Executive Board of the denomination. That the resolution was referred to the board was no great surprise. I had been cautioned that such would happen by several denominational leaders. Several leaders had pleaded with me not to "overreact" to this action. Apparently, they feared that I would view this action as provocative. The referral to the Executive Board was not, therefore, surprising. It is a way to keep the request bottled up until such time that it is no longer relevant. This is one of the deficits of biennial meetings, when the leadership is not held immediately accountable to the constituency of the denomination. Though the referral was not surprising, the justification for referral was surprising for me as a Baptist.

The leadership pleaded for referral, revealing what can only be construed as naked fear of government. Leaders of this denomination revealed their sincere alarm at the prospect of triggering a response which would result in a court test of the stance, whether through challenging the denomination as having violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or whether through a civil suit levelled against the denomination.

³ J. G. Vos, **Pilate, Pontius** (art.) in Merrill C. Tenney (ed.), **Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1978) 792

Observing these machinations, multiple scriptures suggested themselves to my mind. I recalled the apostolic promise, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” [2 TIMOTHY 1:7]. I also recalled Paul’s assertion, “You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear” [ROMANS 8:15a]. I remembered that the Apostle of Love had boldly declared, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love” [1 JOHN 4:18]. And the unknown author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians attested, “We confidently say,

‘The Lord is my helper,
I will not fear,
what can man do to me?’

[HEBREWS 13:6]

Fear results from denial of God’s power or His presence. The leadership of that denomination appeared to fear Caesar more than they fear God. That denomination, and perhaps most denominations in contemporary Canada, seems more likely to act out of fear of Caesar’s law than out of fear of Holy God.

The fourth and final option presented by Dr. Boice is that *authority for Christians lies with God and Caesar, but God is in the dominant position*. This is, of course, the only valid option for the knowledgeable student of the Word of God. It is position Jesus articulated when He spoke those words to the Pharisees and Herodians—words to which I referred somewhat earlier in the message, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” [MATTHEW 22:21].

As followers of the Master, we Christians recognise the authority of the state; thus, we endeavour to be the very best citizens possible. We obey the speed limits, we pay our taxes honestly, we vote in elections, we support worthy civic endeavours, we speak well of those who govern, and we respect their office and we pray for them.

There is yet another way in which we Christians function as the best citizens, however. This is by opposing the state verbally and through acts of non-compliance whenever the state strays from its role as fostering the good and restraining the evil. Christians must serve as the moral conscience of the state, holding the state accountable should it overstep the limits of divine authority or should it forsake its God-given role. The areas of potential conflict are addressed in the remainder of this message.

THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY — Paul does not teach that the state is beyond criticism because it is divinely ordained. In most cases, Christians will submit to government, although they will refuse to yield absolute rights to government. As Christians, we must bear in mind that every demand originating from the state is to be evaluated in light of the Word of God. Indeed, the child of God is expected to contribute responsibly to the maintenance of a social order that will serve as a terror to bad conduct. Nevertheless, the Christian draws his line of resistance when the state demands loyalty that must be reserved for God alone. The authority of the state is limited and cannot encroach upon the realms of evangelism, morality, freedom of peaceable assembly, freedom of speech and freedom to practise our Faith without interference.

Christians cannot recognise the authority of the state in the area of evangelism.

Jesus gave us a command. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. To the disciples gathered in Jerusalem before His ascension, Jesus gave this command. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” [ACTS 1:8].

Municipal governments, and even some provincial governments, have at various times attempted to regulate such activities as witnessing or even meeting for the purpose of prayer and worship; but such efforts are in opposition to the divine will of Holy God.

Pastors are responsible to declare “the whole counsel of God” [see ACTS 20:27]. Christians are to be witnesses of God. This is our calling, and we are not to cease from pursuing this command, even should we be commanded to cease by civil authorities. Baptists in Quebec were jailed for preaching the Gospel of Christ during the 1960s, just as their spiritual forebears were imprisoned and beaten in Massachusetts and Virginia two hundred fifty years earlier. Yet, their evangelistic efforts have continued to this day.

Should we be commanded to be silent, we have previously witnessed the appropriate response because it is recorded in Scripture. The Apostles had been ordered by the Jewish authorities to be silent concerning what they knew to be true about Jesus. Nevertheless, “Peter and John answered [the Jewish Council], ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’” [ACTS 4:19, 20]. The Apostles were threatened and released, but they immediately returned to preaching. This resulted in yet another arrest and the indictment, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” To this charge Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men” [ACTS 5:28, 29].

A second limitation of the power of the state lies within the realm of morality.

No government has the right to command Christians to perform immoral or non-Christian acts. Governments cannot coerce women to abort their babies, as the Chinese government attempts to do, in the case of a second child of a mother. No government is justified in seeking to compel a Christian to approve of unrighteous behaviour, much less to attempt to normalise such behaviour.

Dutch citizens, suffering under German occupation during the Second World War, were ordered to have no dealings with Jews. This was an unjustified demand on Dutch citizens to behave immorally, and conscientious Christians were honour bound to disobey such an evil directive. Corrie ten Boom⁴ and her family were right to hide Jews in disobedience to the German imposed laws.

Likewise, in Germany proper, Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁵ and Martin Niemöller⁶ were right to oppose Hitler, organising an underground church in order to preach the truth, even though it meant imprisonment and even death. Though their action exposed their fellow believers to danger, they were conscience bound to act to resist the Führer.

⁴ Corrie ten Boom Elizabeth Sherrill, and, John Sherrill, **The Hiding Place** (Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1971)

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, **The Cost of Discipleship** (Macmillan, NY 1963)

⁶ Hubert G. Locke (ed.) **Exile in the Fatherland: Martin Niemöller’s Letters from Moabit Prison** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1986)

In this present day, Christians must insist that sexual immorality—whether homosexual activity, cohabiting for sexual benefit or any sexual activity outside of marriage—dishonours God. Love compels us to speak out against racism, just as we must warn against the dangers inherent in a pluralistic society. We must caution both government and corporations against greed and corruption. We must teach what the Bible says concerning gender discrimination—both discrimination against women and discrimination against men. We must hold society accountable for the manner in which the aged are treated. We dare not be silent concerning the quiet holocaust of millions of infants slaughtered in utero or as the most vulnerable members of society are quietly eliminated through what the Dutch now refer to as the “good death”—euthanasia.

Government is also proscribed from intruding into the realms of freedom of peaceable assembly, freedom of speech and freedom to practise our Faith without interruption or interference. These freedoms—defined as unalienable rights in the American Bill of Rights—are not necessarily guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian document does expressly state that “everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression...; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.”

However, preceding this list of fundamental freedoms, the preliminary clause, obviously written by lawyers, asserts, “The ***Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*** guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject **only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified** in a free and democratic society.” In other words, the right to practise my Faith, the right to assemble peaceably, the right to hold thoughts contrary to the majority of society and the right to express those same thoughts, is limited by what the courts decide is justified. If ever a case for conflict between God and Caesar was being prepared, assuredly this is it.

Trinity Western University challenged the power of the British Columbia College of Teachers when they sought leave to have graduates of their teachers program certified to teach in British Columbia. In a controversial ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada found that graduates of the Christian school could be certified.⁷ Nevertheless, for believers in the Son of God, the comments of some of the justices should be worrisome. For instance, Justice Ian Binnie stated that, “It’s all very well to say, ‘love the sinner but hate the sin,’ but is that not a contradiction in terms? While the religious may preach tolerance, religion is often an engine of intolerance.” Using Mr. Justice Binnie’s logic, Winston Churchill was wrong to hate the Nazis’ sin.

Justice Binnie also sat on the case that referred books advocating same sex parents back to the Surrey School Board, demanding review without any religious consideration. However, conscientious Christians are not permitted to leave conscience at home as they go about the work to which God has assigned them. Stated another way, my faith, of necessity, dictates how I live and informs my moral and ethical decisions.⁸

⁷ “Trinity Western University v. British Columbia College of Teachers,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_Western_University_v._British_Columbia_College_of_Teachers, accessed 21 July 2011; Julie Foster, “Christian university wins victory,” World Net Daily, http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=22933, accessed 21 July 2011

⁸ Cf. “Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chamberlain_v._Surrey_School_District_No._36, accessed 21 July 2011

Let that sink in. What you believe determines how you conduct your life. Your faith—the truths you hold as essential and foundational—is played out in the decisions you make on a daily basis. What you believe is seen in how you live; all else is mere “God talk.” Telling me what you believe is meaningless in the final analysis; what matters is how you live out the precepts that are held to be essential.

On June 8, 1999, Parliament passed the following motion by a vote of 216-55: “That, in the opinion of this House, it is necessary, in light of public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.”⁹ This motion was felt necessary in light of a decision by the Supreme Court that the opposite sex definition of “spouse” in Ontario’s Family Law Act was a violation of the Charter. Other courts moved rapidly to impose by judicial fiat in other provinces what shortly became a tidal wave to overwhelm even Canada’s elected representatives.

When the Parliamentary Justice Committee was weighing its recommendation concerning same sex marriage, in a representation before that committee, Lois Mitchell made a disquieting prediction that has largely come true in this day. She cautioned that, (a) Marriage will be redefined to include same-sex couples; (b) dissident religious groups will have the legal right to perform same-sex marriages; (c) churches or clergy who refuse to perform same-sex marriages may be subjected to legal action; (d) ultimately this is a major step in the direction of criminalising any opposition to the practise and normalisation of homosexuality; (e) this proposal does nothing to strengthen either marriage or family in Canada; and (f) courts will continue to advance a “liberal” (small l) agenda and religious groups who do not give in to this political and legal pressure will reinforce assumptions and stereotypes of intolerance within secular society. Her predictions have largely come to pass as anyone who openly speaks against what the Bible calls wickedness is castigated as hateful, mean-spirited and intolerant.

Thus, Christians are challenged to determine whether they will obey God, or whether they will obey Caesar. Moreover, the challenges will increase. There will be no quiet retreats for believers in days to come. What shall be done? As Christians, we are responsible, first and foremost to obey God. Have you prayed for those in authority? This is our first duty. Paul says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4].

As wise and good citizens, I suggest that we are required to speak out forcefully on all issues that impinge on ethical and moral truth. Christians should correspond with parliamentarians, revealing their uncompromising stance on morality. Christians should graciously present their convictions when challenge. In this way, we fulfil the instruction Peter delivered. “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” [1 PETER 3:15].

⁹ Mary C. Hurley, “Sexual Orientation and Legal Rights: A Chronological Overview,” Revised 26 September 2005, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0413-e.htm> , accessed 29 July 2011

Again, we Christians are responsible to be salt and light where we live and where we work. Do not imagine that God will gather a great multitude to resist evil; evil must be resisted by the individual and moment by moment in the home and in the workplace. If you condone friends or family living together in an immoral situation, you are part of the problem. If you have tolerated the intrusion and insinuation of immorality into your family, accepting as entertainment that which is deviant and immoral, you are part of the problem. If you are silent in the face of ethical deviation in the workplace or in the home, you are a part of the problem. If you have been silent when wicked people ridiculed that which is good and noble, you are part of the problem. You are called to be salt and light. Ask yourself, "Who is a Christian today because of your witness?" I trust the question leaves you disquieted, uncomfortable, ill at ease.

In this context, Bonhoeffer writes: "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals... Every man is called separately, and must follow alone. But men are frightened of solitude, and they try to protect themselves from it by merging themselves in the society of their fellow men and in their material environment. They become suddenly aware of their responsibilities and duties, and are loathe to part with them. But all this is only a cloak to protect them from having to make a decision. They are unwilling to stand alone before Jesus and to be compelled to decide with their eyes fixed on him alone... It is Christ's will that he should be thus isolated, and that he should fix his eyes solely upon him."¹⁰

Lastly, I recommend that when state usurps the position of God, we must in conscience resist, practising civil disobedience. There must come a time when the child of God refuses to obey unjust laws. The conscientious minister of Christ cannot perform, much less approve of, same sex unions. The church must give clear voice in condemning the practise of homosexuality and lesbianism. We must be careful not to permit ourselves to hate sinners, for we were each once condemned sinners ourselves.

Do you recall Paul's words that caution against condoning evil acts, much less performing those same acts? "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11].

We must be thoroughly Christian, seeking every opportunity to worship. I am deeply concerned at the attitudes manifest by some who wish to be known as Christians, but who endeavour to avoid the opprobrium associated with godliness. We need one another, and the more so in an evil day. Listen to the Word of God.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" [HEBREWS 10:23-25].

In 1774, a Baptist from Massachusetts, Isaac Backus, came to Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia to present a petition against the power of the state to tax Baptists to support the established church. Drawing on the watchword of all friends of liberty, Backus declared the statute to be "taxation without representation."

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 105

Backus had powerful opponents. John Adams said Baptists could as easily expect a change in the solar system as to hope Massachusetts would give up its established church.¹¹ Samuel Adams, with rising blood pressure, accused Backus and the Baptists of simply being stingy, of refusing to “pay the pence” on economic grounds.

Backus cried out, “It is not the pence, but the power to impose the pence,” to which Baptists objected. He pleaded for separation of church and state and for complete religious liberty. He worked for more than forty years for those goals and lived to see the adoption of the First Amendment to the American Constitution, guaranteeing religious liberty.

More and more, I am conscious of the coercive power of the state. This awareness does not, however, permit me to live in fear of the power of the state. Instead, I find that I resort even more firmly to the Word of God and His power. There is no security to be found in lawyers or through appeal to the courts. Even if one foe is bested in the precincts of jurisprudence, there will arise yet another to oppose righteousness.

Parliament and the various provincial legislatures pass a blizzard of laws, inundating citizens with curbs on our freedoms. Each law is ostensibly enacted in an attempt to make Canada a better country in which to live. As citizens, we are caught up in any of a number of laws designed to protect us from ourselves or to ensure that we remain a “nice” people.

If you have not witnessed the encroachment of the state into the precincts of the True and Living God, I can only wonder where you have been. Wake up! Take steps now to prepare for the inevitable conflict. Begin now to pray for those in authority, asking that God give them wisdom and grace so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives. Address the issues. Make yourself aware and write to those individuals who make the laws which direct our daily affairs. Be the salt and light which God intended you to be. Cease your silence and speak out for righteousness. At last, draw your line in the sand, preparing yourself to refuse the encroachment of the state into the sacred precincts.

I do fear that you will fail in all your intentions, however, until such time that you become a Christian. That must be addressed through submission to Christ the Lord as Master of your life. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Amen.

¹¹ Bynum Shaw, **Divided We Stand—The Baptists in American Life** (Moore Publishing Co., Durham, NC 1975) 65