

Civil Disobedience

By Trey Dimsdale

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read 1 Peter 2:13–17. Peter told Christ followers to honor civil authorities for the Lord's sake. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: How does this passage indicate that God is honored by this?

Assignment Two

Read Exodus 1:15–20. Put yourself in the place of one of the Hebrew midwives. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What are three other ways they could have responded to Pharaoh. Does it surprise you that God blessed them even though they were disobedient and lied to the king?

Assignment Three

Read Joshua 2:1–7, 14 and 6:22–23. Prepare to tell the story of Rahab to your group. Be able to identify if this is an example of civil disobedience. If it is, how is it and how did God respond?

Scripture to Memorize

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand how a Christian should balance obligations to God and to the civil authority when these two are in conflict.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

On your first day of work at the school district, you get a list of assignments from your boss. One of them requires you to help plan a program in January that celebrates the anniversary of the legalization of abortion. Every person on staff is required to participate. When you and a co-worker from church tell the boss the assignment conflicts with your faith, he dismisses your thoughts. Then he tells you, "Participate in this or you will not remain here." What do you do? Participate or quit?

Read Daniel 3 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image. These verses don't give much detail about the statue, but it was clearly an idol made to honor a false god of Babylon.

Verse 4. Peoples, nations, and languages. The command to worship the golden image was universal and applied to all who lived in Babylon. Clearly, people were living there who had their own customs, religions and gods. Nebuchadnezzar knew this but required everyone to worship the god he created.

Verse 6. a burning fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar warned that those who failed to worship the idol would receive a severe punishment.

Verse 7. all the peoples . . . fell down. All the people (except the Hebrew boys) bowed down to worship the golden image.

Discussion Question

An idol does not have to be a wooden or golden statue made by men. An idol can be a person, idea, or even a habit. What are some idols you are pressured to "worship"? What idols does our society expect us to "worship"? What are the consequences if you refuse to conform?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** can now share an answer to the following question: How does 1 Peter 2:13–17 indicate that God is pleased by disciples honoring the civil authorities?

Studying the Passage

Earlier in the book, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego had been appointed by the king to serve as leaders in the government. This made these men much more visible than they may have otherwise been, and it also meant that some were jealous of their favor with the king.

Verse 8. Maliciously accused the Jews. Some men who sought to do them harm went to the king to report that they failed to worship the golden image.

Verse 12. These men . . . pay no attention to you. The accusers equated the Hebrews' failure to worship the golden image with disloyalty and disrespect.

Verse 13. rage. Nebuchadnezzar responded with rage and sent for the three men.

Verse 15. who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands? Clearly Nebuchadnezzar did not understand the power of the God of the Hebrews. He also thought much more highly of himself than he should.

Verse 16. Said to the king. When asked, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego boldly explained to the king why they refused to bow to the golden image, even in the face of the threat of death.

Verses 17–18. our God . . . is able to deliver us. . . . But if not. The three men did not equivocate. They knew the severe consequences of their decision. They had confidence in God even though Nebuchadnezzar had just challenged His power over the situation. Even if God chose not to deliver them, however, the men still courageously faced death for their actions. They provide an excellent example to modern believers who must face the penalty for disobedience to civil authorities when the civil authority requires disobedience to God.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who prepared **Assignment Two** may now share answers to the following questions: What are three other ways the Hebrew midwives could have responded to Pharaoh? Does it surprise you that God blessed them even though they were disobedient and lied to the king?

On Your Own

In the space below, compare and contrast the responses of the Hebrew midwives and the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego when those who had ordered them to disobey God's law confronted them.

Discussion Question

Compare the lists written above. What was different in these situations that would cause God to look on the actions of each group with favor, even though they approached their situations in different ways? Does God's approval of the midwives justify lying?

Studying the Passage

Verse 19. filled with fury. Nebuchadnezzar was furious with the three men, so his response was not measured. He ordered them arrested by elite soldiers and had the furnace so hot that it killed the men who threw them in.

Verses 24. King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished. God chose to deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from the furnace.

Verse 25. the appearance of the fourth is like the son of the gods. When the men were thrown in, a fourth man joined them. Commentators disagree as to whether this was Jesus or an angel in the furnace with them, but the point is that God provided for these men when they faced intense persecution for their faithfulness.

Verse 27. the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. When they left the furnace, it was clear that the fire had no effect on them.

Discussion Question

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego knew God might not choose to deliver them, but they still chose to face death. How could they have such courage? If you are called to stand up for what is right against a ruler or civil authority, do you think you can have this type of courage? How can you prepare for a situation like that?

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who prepared **Assignment Three** can now share a report.

On Your Own

This lesson examined three different situations that illustrate civil disobedience honored by God. List the common themes in the space below. What guidelines for disobeying civil authorities can you derive from these biblical examples?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

According to Scripture, God has ordained civil authorities for our benefit (see 1 Peter 2:13–17; Romans 13:1–7). We are to obey these authorities because they ultimately derive their authority from God (see Romans 13:1). Sometimes, however, these authorities order people to act in ways contrary to God’s law. Fortunately, we have biblical examples of courageous men and women who risked their lives to honor God rather than men.

According to Scripture, a couple of things are important when considering when and how we may disobey an earthly authority.

1. Believers must fear God rather than man (see Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:16–18; Acts 5:29).
2. Believers must be willing to face the consequences that follow and trust God to be just (see Daniel 3:16–18).

Two issues are at stake in each of these stories.

1. The protection of life is what motivated Rahab and the Hebrew midwives to disobey and then lie to the civil authorities (see Exodus 1:15–20; Joshua 2:1–7).
2. Believers have an obligation to honor God, and God alone (see Daniel 3; Acts 5:27– 32).

When persecution comes and believers are faced with consequences for standing up for what is right, believers

- who have cultivated a relationship of reverence and respect with God,
- who have considered their lives as an offering to Him and a witness to others, and
- who have faith in His justice and mercy

will be those best equipped to make the most God-honoring choices in such circumstances.

Follow up Question

What will you do when you are faced with an order from a legitimate source of authority to act in a way that dishonors God?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.