Across this country there is a great divide concerning the plans to reopen the nation. Some believe the closures are hyped-up and fear driven and we should be free to reopen as soon as possible. Others believe even the present course of reopening is way too soon.

Most of the rest of us are somewhere in the middle – ready to move forward, but doing so with utmost care and caution, not only for ourselves, but the vulnerable among us. The discussion gets hairy for many of us concerning the reopening of our local churches. There are several considerations that surround this question, but one I’d like to think through today is the authority of the church as it relates to the authority of the state. Particularly, should we as churches exercise our right to assemble even if it means disobeying the state guidelines? At present, residents of our state of are being asked to limit gatherings to no more than 10 people, with strict distancing being followed. So to resume normally right now, for most churches, would clearly violate the standards we’ve been asked to follow.

There are cases in Scripture when God’s people did – rightfully – disobey their government authorities. And the question for us is: *Is the current situation one of those rightful times?*

The way I’ve heard civil disobedience justified biblically is quite simple. You may rightfully disobey the government under two circumstances:

1) when you have been commanded to do something God forbids. Or…

2) when you have been forbidden to do something God commands.

You can find examples of both of these circumstances in the book of Daniel. You’ll remember Daniel’s companions in chapter 3 were commanded to do what God forbid: worship an idol. They disobeyed that law of the state because their higher allegiance to God overrode such a command. Then recall Daniel himself in chapter 6 being forbidden to pray to and worship anyone except the king. Again higher allegiance to God granted Daniel to disregard the law of the state and keep praying to the only one we should be praying to. He could not do what the state had forbidden.

In both cases the law of the land was intentionally used to target believers and destroy them. That is the difference between us and Daniel right now.

Is the government, at present, targeting Christians? No. Are they forbidding our worship? No, you can still worship God. We’ve been asked not to gather, and is the reason valid? Yes, the threat is not unreal. And the threat unfortunately thrives in close communities like our public worship services. It is the government’s duty to preserve and protect its people, hence the present guidelines. **Let’s not reframe their intentions to justify a call for civil disobedience.** That is *not* the issue at present.

I hope that helps you consider your own local church and it’s leaders who are striving to create community while submitting to the guidelines we’ve been given.

*Lord, we confess we need your wisdom. Guide our churches to do what is right and pleasing in your sight. Our government has been ordained by you for our protection. And you have also ordained your church to preach and represent your Son here on earth. Give us strength and endurance. Our grand desire is not so much meeting again, that would be wonderful and good, but the most needed and desired is that you be glorified, even if that now means humble submission. Amen.*