

Choosing to Obey God When Everything Is Against You

I was fresh out of seminary and the new pastor of a Baptist church in a little South Carolina town when Martin Luther King Jr. led his famous march from Montgomery to Selma, Ala.

We did a lot of talking about racial segregation in our deacons' meetings those days. Everyone was defensive. "We're integrated," one man said. "When Miss Jessie died we allowed her maid to come to the funeral and sit in the balcony along with her pickaninny."

Not too far away, in Greensboro, N.C., four black college students refused to move from a Woolworth lunch counter when denied service. It was 1961. By September more than 70,000 students, whites and blacks, had participated in sit-ins.

Our deacons appointed a special committee to patrol the street in front of the church in case "the darkies" tried to get in. "They got their own churches," Harry Lemwood, a grocer, used to say. "Let 'em go there."

I groaned over the injustice, but when King marched on Selma, I did not join him—even though I knew he was right. I didn't even stand up in my pulpit and applaud him. I kept silent. I wasn't afraid of Bull Conner. Or the snarling police dogs. Or of being put in jail.

What I feared most was losing my "job" as pastor. I preached against segregation—which was acceptable because of King's sacrifice. But I knew better than to do anything rash—like marching.

I just stayed home and preached the gospel. I quoted Romans 13—that Christians should not break the law—to justify my stance. No matter that the law said blacks were inferior to

whites. No matter that it was cruel, dehumanizing and anti-Christ. It was the law.

By isolating Romans 13 from the rest of the Bible, I justified legalized sin. Today, I still feel guilty for not marching. All this came to mind recently when I talked with my friend Guy Strayhorn, an attorney from Fort Myers, Fla., Guy had just returned from Atlanta where he took part in one of the Operation Rescue demonstrations at an abortion clinic.

As a member of the bar, Guy is sworn to uphold the law. But which law? In this case he believed there was a direct conflict between God's law and man's law. He went to Atlanta in the spirit of Shiphrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who deliberately disobeyed the Egyptian Pharaoh when ordered to kill baby Hebrew boys.

Yet by breaking the law they saved the lives of innocent babies—including one named Moses. Civil disobedience. Or as James Dobson calls it—spiritual obedience.

Guy went to Atlanta because he believes unborn babies are human beings. He went for the same reason I should have gone to Selma—to protest national evil.

In choosing to obey God rather than man, he paid the same price Daniel paid—who was thrown into a den of lions; the same price Peter and John paid—who were arrested and badly beaten.

Changes for good come because men like Martin King and Guy Strayhorn take a stand. How easy it is for us modern-day priests and Levites to quote Scripture that justifies inaction.

Charles Stanley did this when he and his deacons at Atlanta's First Baptist Church publicly condemned Operation Rescue. In his statement he did what I did 30 years ago. He quoted Romans 13:2—to break the law is to rebel against God.

Then he called Roe vs. Wade “the law of the land.” But did Paul mean we should not object when unborn babies are murdered? Yet Stanley argued that if we protest, “anarchy and chaos will ultimately result, and then it will be very difficult to preach the gospel.”

But a “gospel” that sanctions the wholesale murder of children is not the gospel of Christ—it is the gospel of Pharaoh and Herod. Stanley said, “Jesus advocated submission to authority and not civil dis-obedience as a means of effecting change.”

He’s wrong. Jesus not only advocated civil disobedience. He practiced it by disobeying the Jewish law, which was “the law of the land.” Yet this was not His primary means of effecting change. Real change came when Jesus took spiritual authority over the demonic forces that put men in bondage.

In July, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to hand down a decision involving Roe vs, Wade. Justice Harry Blackmun, who authored the 1973 decision legalizing abortion, has predicted the new court will overturn that decision.

Oral arguments are now being heard. Although I applaud Operation Rescue for drawing attention to the horror of mass abortion, the battle will not be won on the curbs of America.

Protests and demonstrations will not sway the US. Supreme Court. Their decision will be based on each justice’s interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.

A godly interpretation is now possible; but bank on this—Satan will throw all the powers of hell at the justices to confuse their minds. The real struggle is against what Paul calls “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

American Christians—through fasting and prayer—can push those forces back, allowing the justices to hear from God, for some of them are praying people.

So what should I do? Sit on a curb in front of an abortion clinic? Yes, but only if God tells me. However, I don't have to ask about spiritual warfare. That I must do. That I will do.

From 1979 until his death, Jamie Buckingham (1932-1992) wrote the "Last Word" column for *Charisma* magazine, which originally published this article. He was the editor of *Ministry Today* magazine at his untimely death in February 1992—more than 20 years ago.