

Romans 13:1-7

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. . . . Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

This raises concerns and questions:


What about human authorities that are abusive of us and others?

Is civil disobedience ever justified in the name of love, truth, or justice?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”



Martin Luther

Nelson Mandela

Corrie ten Boom

Martin Luther King Jr.

A great cloud of witnesses have had to navigate difficult choices between competing absolutes.

Joshua 2:4-6 Hebrews 11:31

“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”



Was not Rahab also disobedient in not submitting to “God’s ordained” civil authority?

1. Unavoidable moral conflicts exist.

- Abraham is commanded to kill his son Isaac (Gen.22).
- God assisted Samson to commit suicide (Judges16:30).
- Jephthah is instructed by God to sacrifice his daughter (on a vow to God). (Judges11) (Note Eccl.5:1-4).
- Rahab lies to protect the Hebrew spies (Josh.2; Jas.2:25).
- The Hebrew midwives disobey the King to protect Moses and are rewarded (Ex.1:15-17).
- Daniel disobeyed civil government (Dan.3,6).
- The apostles refused to obey Jewish authorities and preached the gospel (Acts 5:29).
- David and his men stole consecrated bread to save their lives (Matt.12:3-4).

2. Higher and lower moral laws exist

- The “least” (Matt.5:19) and “greatest” commandments (Matt.22:36).
- The “weightier” matters of the Law (Matt.23:23).
- The “greater sin” of Judas (Jn.19:11).
- The “greatest” virtue (1 Cor.13:13; Jn.15:13).
- Degrees of punishment and reward (Matt.5:22; Rom.2:6; Rev. 20:12; 1 Cor.3:11f).
- Degrees of Church discipline (1 Cor.5, 11:30).

Romans 13

“8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, “*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,*” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.”

What this passage is not addressing:

It's not about avoiding financial indebtedness.

It's not about self love as necessary to love others.

It's not about satisfying the demands of the law so as to be justified before God.

It's not about following subjective feelings or not hurting anyone else's feelings in the name of love.

Romans 13:8-10

*This passage is providing guidance in facing the conflicting moral demands of life. **We are not obligated to do anything that is unloving.***



Romans 13:8-10

But what is loving?

“10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.”

*Love is “neighbor” sensitive.
Love is tied to ethical absolutes.*



Seven considerations

- Agape love is the goal
- Hierarchy of absolutes is the rule
- Damage control is recognized
- Aquinas' test is a guide
- A compass is our model
- Our baptism must be taken seriously
- Facing in the right direction helps

- Agape love is the goal

Agape is distinct in that it is more **self sacrificing, unconditional, & intentional.**

Agape
sacrificial
caring

Philia
warm
affection

Eros
sensual
longing

Storge
natural
loyalty



Bell Hooks

“Love is moving toward another person’s soul with a commitment to help them reach the deepest desire of their heart.”

(which is reconciliation with God, self, & others)

- **Hierarchy of absolutes is the rule**

When a fireman breaks into a house (destroys property) to save a life, he is not condemned for abusing someone else’s property.

Biblical Examples

- **Love for God over love for man** — Matt.22:34-40.
- **Obey God over human government** — Acts 5:29.
- **Life-saving mercy over truth telling** — Josh.2.

- **Damage control is recognized**

Matthew 19:8

“Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.”

Examples

- **Divorce is sometimes better than abuse.**
- **Could this apply to other difficult issues like war, abortion, euthanasia, etc.?**

Most people recognize different types of lies.

Black lies

Genesis 3:4
“You surely shall not die.”

Matthew 26:74
“I do not know the man.”

Lies to cause harm to others or to protect the liar

Gray lies

War
Sport
Grace

Lies that are socially expected

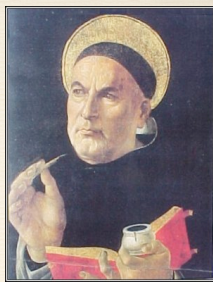
White lies

Joshua 2:5
“I do not know where the men went.”

Lies that serve a noble end

- **Aquinas’ test is a guide**

Good decisions should pass the test of three questions.



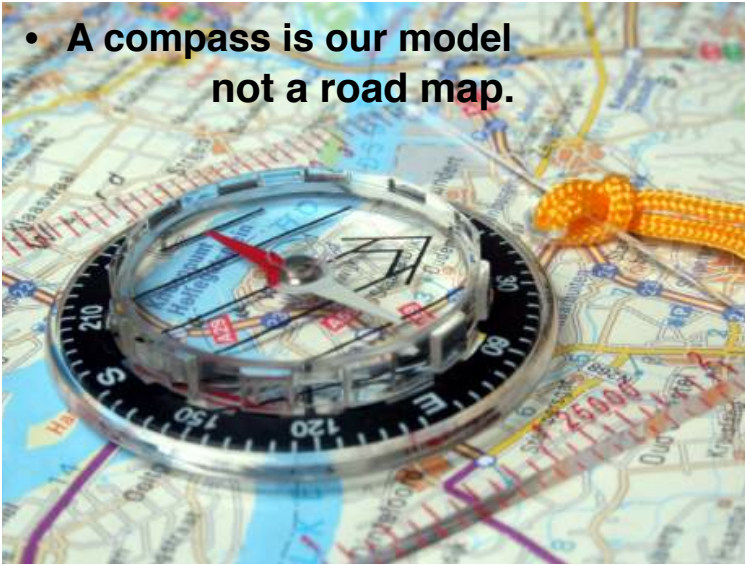
Thomas Aquinas

- ✓ **Does the Scripture address the issue directly?**
- ✓ **Is your motive one of selfless love or is it fear, anger, etc.?** A technical conformity to the letter of the law without a loving heart is no virtue.
- ✓ **Is the timing right?** A good deed or word done at the wrong time and in the wrong setting can be more harmful than helpful.

Three responses to avoid

- **Legalism** - respects only the first point (above) “What does the manual tell me I am to do?”
- **Subjectivism** - respects only the second point (above). “If my motives are loving, my actions will be virtuous.”
- **Situationalism** - respects only the third (above). “Do what is expedient.”

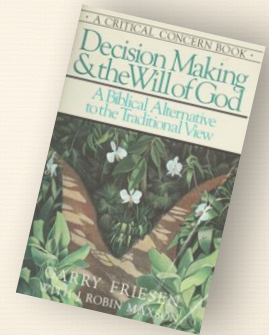
- A compass is our model not a road map.



“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” **James 1:5**



Garry Friesen



- Our baptism must be taken seriously

Romans 12:1-2



“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice**, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **so that you may prove what the will of God is**, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

- Facing the right direction is key

It's much easier to find your way when you are facing in the right direction.

“In many cases, our need to wonder about or be told what God wants in a certain situation is nothing short of a clear indication of how little we are engaged in His work.”

Dallas Willard

What I try to do

- **Remember** - God gives me a compass not a road map. Fear not.
- **Pray** - Not for revelation so much as clear thinking, pure motives, & courageous faith.
- **Reflect on past decisions** - What have I learned from the past?
- **Get advice** - Seek out others who I trust will not just tell me what I want to hear.
- **Correct for selfish bias** - Give deference to the hardest option.
- **Take time** - Give time to let a decision set for a while before acting on it.

- **What if** - If someone else came to me with this challenge and asked me for advice as to how **THEY** could best reflect Christ - what advice would I give them?

When I take away MY personal stuff - fears, anger, prejudice, etc. what would I do?