

# Is it right to cancel church? Aren't we disobeying the Bible?

*Answered by Walt Williamson*

Obeing God is at the heart of this issue so let's look in the Bible for what God says. We gather together to worship God through reading his word, hearing what it means as it is preached, singing songs of praise to God, and for fellowship with other believers. This is so important that we are told to meet together. Be honest, how much time apart from church do you actually spend worshipping God. In addition, many people were not literate throughout history and the bible was not available in their language if they could read. They would not have had the opportunity to hear God's word apart from the worship service. It is God's word that shows us our depravity, the consequences of our sin, and the only remedy for sin through Jesus Christ.

There is a rich history of civil disobedience by Christians and those who love God. It is ongoing by Christians in many countries today. Let's look at two of these times that are in the bible and examine why.

- Daniel 3. Read the whole chapter and see that the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disobeyed King Nebuchadnezzar and refused to bow down to the golden image that he had made and worship it. They were obedient to God even though they got thrown into a furnace because they disobeyed the king. They knew God's laws that were given to Moses and obeyed God over obeying the King. See Exodus 20:1-5. God was glorified by delivering them from the furnace.
- Acts 4. Peter and John were arrested because they were

teaching and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. When they were brought before the rulers, elders, scribes, and Chief Priest, they were threatened and told to stop speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus. They said no, we will listen to God instead of you. After they were released, they went to other Christians and prayed and worshipped God with them. God showed his approval by shaking the place where they gathered filling all of them with the Holy Spirit.

In each of these biblical examples, the civil authorities are taking action to stop the worship of the true God to put in place worship of an idol or a system of works for salvation. In each case we see that civil disobedience that honored God was right. We need to be strong and courageous even to death and put God above all civil authority.

Now let's compare these examples with the actions taken by President Trump and Governor Inslee that required us to stop meeting together, including not meeting for worship. The intent is clear. It is intended to stop the spread of a deadly virus and in no way is there any attempt to target Christians or to stop the worship of God. The churches were not set apart for these closures. Many things are closed and millions are affected. As our leaders they have needed to make and communicate difficult and weighty decisions that they know will affect everyone so pray for them. Their actions are within their authority as leaders who are held responsible for the people they lead. So, what does the bible say about this?

- Romans 13:1-2 "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement."
- 1 Peter 2: 13-17. This passage also tells us to be subject to our leaders.

(Note that in the Romans passage that there is a penalty for resisting the authorities when they are acting in accordance with the will of God.)

We are obeying God by not meeting together and being subject to the civil authorities during this pandemic. I look forward to the time when we can meet together again face to face to worship.