

RETHINKING THE BIBLE, WITH JACK PELHAM

Episode 11: The American Mask Crisis, and How Romans 13:1 Does Not Prohibit Civil Disobedience, Part C

Welcome to Rethinking the Bible with Jack Pelham. This is an audio podcast, where we apply Reality-Based Thinking to interpreting the Bible. Reality-Based Thinking is my name for a philosophy that seeks to make constant use of honesty, rationality, and responsibility in seeking out the reality of things. And I define reality as the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to one's perceptions, beliefs, or wishes about them.

This is the third part of three in this series. So far in this lengthy discussion, we've done a lot of examining of things that are examined too seldom in the churches today. We've actually walked through it, holding the popular interpretation of Romans 13 in one hand, while holding the verse-by-verse details in the other hand. And we've seen that they don't match very well.

And today, we're going to talk more about the specifics of the current American crisis, but before we do that, I want to finish up considering the Romans 13 passage. Last time, we got through verse 4 or so, and Paul sums it up with this in verses 5 through 7:

⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. ⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Because this passage in English makes use of the super-common word, "taxes", it is tempting to think that it must be a reference to the common taxes paid to the human government—both of their time, and of ours. I looked up the word for "taxes" in the Greek here in the same 50 Bible versions I mentioned in the earlier episode, and it is translated either as "taxes" or "tribute", with no other variations being found. The Greek word is φόρος (*phoros*) occurs only 5 times in 4 verses in the so-called "New Testament".

In two of those verses, Luke 20:22 and Luke 23:2, it's explicitly talking about paying tribute to Caesar, and the other two verses are where it's used here in our present context in Romans 13.

To be fair, had this been talking about a tax for Caesar, he certainly would have qualified as one of the "higher powers" on the planet at that time. So if you want this to be about human government, this is your best shot. But Caesar doesn't fit the REST of the description in Romans 13:1-7, and we've already discussed this.

If I'm right, though, and it's talking about God having put holy angels in a position of authority over the local congregations of Christians, then we may be tempted to balk at the idea of those angels taxing those Christians—simply because it's an awkward thought for us, never having given any thought to it before. And several cognitive biases can come into play here. We tend to have a status quo bias about our beliefs, by which we simply don't want to change them, one way or the other, but to maintain the status quo. And this kind of bias may well play out with some manner of self-talk like these one-liners:

- If this were true, I would have heard about it already.

- If I were wrong about this, I would know it.
- If my preacher were wrong about this, I would know it.
- God wouldn't let me—or my preacher—be wrong about this.

And it's important to know that this kind of bias doesn't necessarily have to be played out in specific words like this, but merely in the mental **attitude** that would accompany such words. And people are very good at having such an attitude, even if they rarely put it into words.

But if we actually wanted to examine the idea of congregation-overseeing angels being paid for their services, there are a couple of things we could find that would make it seem like the idea wasn't completely pulled from thin air. We know, for example, the widows who were godly as they should have been were supported by the congregations. This may have been largely forgotten by the congregations today, but here it is in the text:

1 Timothy 5:⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,^[a]¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

And we know from this same chapter that that elders in the congregations were paid:

1 Timothy 5:17-18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages"

And we know that apostles, too, were thought to have a natural right to be compensated for their work. Here's Paul in a lengthier discussion of this fact:

1 Corinthians 9:³ This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife,^[a] as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

⁸ Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Paul lays it on thick about this principle that the worker deserves his wages. And this went not only for apostles, but for those who were working in the Temple and at the altar, and those who were proclaiming the gospel.

So, how would an overseeing angel fit into this principle of not muzzling the ox?

Back in the Romans 13 passage we've been considering, Paul tells his audience regarding these "higher powers" that they:

give their full time to governing.

So, what would Paul say about whether full-time workers in Christ should be paid?

It certainly sounds reasonable so far to me—unless angels are magical beings who have no needs that a salary could help to meet.

And this raises all manner of questions for us, for most of us have never examined the lives of angels, and whether they would need any manner of income to support themselves. How about this question?: Do they need food? Most, I imagine, would be tempted to say "no", but on what basis? Supposition?

You should know that there are references in the Bible and in some extrabiblical Ancient Near Eastern writings—even Hebrew writings—about angels eating. I'll give you just one example, for brevity. In Genesis 18 and 19, Abraham is visited by what the text originally describes as "three men", but in time, we see that one of those men is the Lord, and that the other two are angels. Well, Abraham provides what is needed for them to wash their feet, to rest under a tree, and to eat a meal. And the text explicitly says that they ate it:

Genesis 18: He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. **While they ate**, he stood near them under a tree.

So, if an angel needed rest and clothing and washing and food, where was he going to get it if he was spending all his time overseeing a congregation of Christians? Wouldn't the congregation have to provide for this? If not them, then who?

While I wish I had more information from scripture about this, this is certainly a reasonable explanation for the taxes or tribute being discussed in this passage.

Surely, some will object, saying, "but it just FEELS like they're talking about normal governmental taxes here." Well, ask yourself this. What's your basis for that feeling if not simply from the habit of your traditional thinking about this passage? What other information do you have from which to base a case that this is about paying taxes to human governments?

Feelings are often evidence of what we are used to—or of how we think things should be. But they're generally not very good evidence of how the Bible should be interpreted. No, that needs to be an evidentiary matter, and not just an emotional one.

So I think that pretty much sums up the discussion of the higher powers being described in Romans 13:1-7. And yes, we could spend weeks on this topic, but I have certainly given you much more to consider already than you're ever apt to hear discussed in many of the modern churches. And again, if you DO discuss this in a modern church, it ends up throwing lots of dust into the air. For example, the most obvious irritant is the question, "So, why aren't these things happening today---and why don't we have angels overseeing our congregations now?"

And that's an exceedingly excellent question. But it tends to undermine the traditional assumptions that underlie most church cultures today. It's much easier to assume—more or less—that whatever was happening then is happening now, and whatever is happening now was happening then. But it's hard to keep kicking against the goads of evidence on this one for very long, so this is why a lot of people simply resort to shutting down the discussion altogether. And the churches, therefore, are largely focused on the types of people who are OK with shutting down the examination---the investigation---the pondering over these things. The people who won't let it go, just aren't going to fit in very well in those kinds of congregations. And if they're not shunned by the congregation first, they'll likely leave on their own accord and try to find somewhere else that is more open to giving careful thought to our ways.

And there are LOTS of churches like this, in my experience. And I've left several of them myself for this kind of reason—that they were disinterested in the reality of the details, and preferred instead to hand-wave the details in deference to some oversimplified, overgeneralized, over-careless version of things.

And ironically, this is exactly---and I mean exactly---this is exactly what's happened in American politics, where the actual details of our American system are ignored and skirted by so very many. Recently, I was rebuked by a friend for refusing the executive orders of my state's governor about wearing masks for COVID-19. She insisted I was disobeying God and the Bible, and she cited---no surprise here---Romans 13:1, using The Living Bible, which renders it, "Obey the government."

And this raises the question, of course, "who is the government?"

Let me ask you this. In the First Century, was there a constitutional republic in view, whose written constitution was the Supreme Law of the Land, and whose office-holders were sworn to abide by it and to defend it against ALL enemies, foreign and domestic?

Is that what their situation was? Or were they more into the fiat rule of despotism?

Well, we could launch into a multi-week lesson on historical forms of government—a lesson that I am not now qualified to teach, mind you. But I think it's known popularly enough that the US Constitution, in its particular mixture of items, is a fairly recent invention in the timeline of the world.

In our system, it's "a government of laws, and not of men", to quote John Adams.

The idea is not a new one. Aristotle figured it out as early as the 300s BC, when he wrote:

"It is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens".
~Aristotle

In fact, John Adams' one-liner was an allusion to Aristotle's idea of an:

“Empire of Laws, and not of Men”

But Aristotle is a newcomer to this discussion, too, for obviously, God himself set up the nation of Israel with a written law—which we know as the Law of Moses. (And for the record, when I say “Nation of Israel”, I’m not talking about this modern state that’s on some of that same land today. No, I’m talking about the nation that God instituted when he brought the Hebrews out of Egypt—and scholars are split on when that happened, but estimates are from the 15th to the 13th centuries BC. So it was a thousand years or more before Aristotle—which is why I say that he was a newcomer to that already-running topic of law-based government.

And God is just the sort to write some things down—or to have them written down, at least. Indeed, we wouldn’t have the Bible if it weren’t for God’s authorized prophets writing things down. And God’s just the sort to deal in precepts and principles. Remember, he’s the sort to say things like “Come, let us reason together” and “Give careful thought to your ways”. And he was the sort to set up the nation of Israel to run according to written laws. And he was the sort to intervene in their business when their transgressions became egregious.

But even though this idea of **principle**-based government was established very early in human history, a great many of the governments of man took a **ruler**-based approach to it. And even so, those governments that did have philosophies closer to the **principles**-based view, they were all quite prone to slipping into despotism and tyranny, when human vice went unchecked. That is, they were prone to slipping away from principles and toward satisfying the selfish motives of the rulers instead.

The godly ideal of government was something more akin to the Latin phrase, *lex rex*—which means “the law is king”, but the worldly idea was—and still is—something much more like the Latin, *rex lex*, which means “the king is law”. Yes, yes, I know that God is the king—but as king, he laid down precepts and laws that were to be followed by all—and even by his kings, such as Saul and David and Solomon etc,—once Israel got to the point of becoming a monarchy. So the idea of law-over-the-king (or *lex rex*) has famously given way to *rex lex* (“the king is law”) again and again in world history.

Louis XIV showed his philosophy about it in his famous saying—and you’ll have to pardon my French here: *‘L’etat c’est moi’*, which means “The state is me”—or as we would say it in English, “I am the state”.

And Richard Nixon showed his philosophical hiney to American when he dared to say to David Frost in an 1977, post-resignation interview:

“...but when the President does it, that means that it is not illegal.”

Oops! In the immortal words of Rubeus Hagrid, “I shouldna said that!”

But this is what tyrants and scoundrels do. They feel entitled to have things their way, rather than to abide by the established law that everybody is supposed to abide by.

And this is what my friend accuses me of regarding the edict about wearing the masks. She says I’m being selfish, and that in my mind, it’s all about me. But what she’s not seeing is that the governor of my state—who recently issued an edict mandating masks—is himself breaking the law in order to do so.

And she's not alone. A great many Americans just aren't educated enough as to how our system was designed to work. And so they get bamboozled by officials when they overstep their powers and do things for which they have no authority.

And the longer this comedy of lawlessness has played out, the more people have started figuring out that their initial impressions of it were wrong. Many thought I was insane and/or immoral to be concerned about the shutting down of the economy when the lockdown orders were issued. They said things like, "How can you focus on the economy when so many lives are on the line?" Their focus was on the great danger—as it was being explained to them at the time. But as things evolved, many of them saw enough evidence of fraud and exaggeration that they eventually began to figure out some of the scheme in all of it.

I live in the State of Montana, so I'm going to demonstrate this for you using our state Constitution, which this governor vowed by oath to support and defend. And if you live in another state, check your own Constitution, which probably has at least some of this same material in it. And your governor has to take an oath to your state's Constitution, too. If our state government (or our federal government, for that matter) were designed to be the rule of men—to be fiat rule—dictatorial rule—despotism—if it were designed to be a totalitarian monarchy where the king has 100% of the powers—then why in the world would the new king have to take an oath to obey some written constitution?

But that's exactly what you have to do here to be in public office—whether you're the President of the United States, or the Governor of a state, or the Mayor of a town, or a police officer. You have to take an oath that specifically mentions your obligation to abide by the Constitution, either of your state, or of the Union, or both.

So, my governor, whose office was created by and is regulated by our state constitution, had to take such an oath when he took office. But his lockdown decree in March, and his recent mask decree in July—along with other things he has done related to this COVID-19 situation—have egregiously violated the very Constitution he swore to uphold.

Let me give you some examples from the Montana Declaration of Rights, which is written quite near the beginning of the Montana Constitution, signifying its importance. Now, this Declaration of Rights is quite similar to what is known as the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution. It has 36 sections—36 specific statements of rights—and I have listed 12 of them that the governor has obviously violated in all this—and there may be more than that. But I'm going to read parts of these 12 sections quickly for you to demonstrate just what a lawless governor this is:

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

ARTICLE II. DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

Section 3. Inalienable rights. All persons are born free and have certain inalienable rights. They include the right to a clean and healthful environment and the rights of pursuing life's basic necessities, enjoying and defending their lives and liberties, acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and seeking their safety, health and happiness in all lawful ways.

Where it says “pursuing life’s basic necessities”, how can this possibly not include the right to have a job and to go to it? Yet the governor, sworn to uphold this, told thousands of us we were not essential, and could not go to work.

Section 4. Individual dignity. The dignity of the human being is inviolable. **No person shall be denied the equal protection of the laws.**

How is it that some can have the liberty to work, and others be told they cannot work?

Section 5. Freedom of religion. The state shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or **prohibiting the free exercise thereof.**

Montana churches were forbidden to meet. Surely, meeting in a church assembly falls under the “free exercise” of religion!

Section 6. Freedom of assembly. **The people shall have the right peaceably to assemble,** petition for redress or peaceably protest governmental action.

Again, the churches were not allowed to assemble. And many other organizations and groups were similarly prohibited by the governor’s lockdown orders from exercising their freedom of assembly. Nor were friends allowed to assemble at their favorite coffee houses and restaurants. And now I’ll read Sections 8 and 9 together before I comment.

Section 8. Right of participation. The public has the right to expect governmental agencies to afford such reasonable opportunity **for citizen participation in the operation of the agencies prior to the final decision** as may be provided by law.

Section 9. Right to know. No person shall be deprived of the right to examine documents or to **observe the deliberations of all public bodies or agencies of state government** and its subdivisions, except in cases in which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure.

Surely it is the case that the governor had private meetings about COVID-19 that the public was NOT allowed to observe or to participate in. There’s no telling which entities had the governor’s ear—and surely, he did not act of his own volition in every COVID-19-related matter.

Section 10. Right of privacy. **The right of individual privacy** is essential to the well-being of a free society and **shall not be infringed** without the showing of a compelling state interest.

The governor implemented contact tracing measures without public consent. This amounts to surveillance without a warrant and without the consent of those being surveilled.

Section 11. Searches and seizures. The **people shall be secure** in their persons, papers, homes and effects **from unreasonable searches and seizures.** No warrant to search any place, or seize any person or thing shall issue without describing the place to be searched or the person or thing to be seized, or without probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation reduced to writing.

This one applies as does Section 10 above to the electronic surveillance that was done for contact tracing. The governor had no warrant for this, but did it anyway.

Section 12. Right to bear arms. The right of any person to keep or bear arms in defense of his own home, person, and property, or in aid of the civil power when thereto legally summoned, shall not be called in question

The governor's mask mandate has the side effect of making it illegal for those with concealed carry permits to carry their guns, for Montana law explicitly states that no one carrying a gun may wear a mask.

Section 16. The administration of justice. Courts of justice shall be open to every person, and speedy remedy afforded for every injury of person, property, or character.

The governor's lockdown substantially shut down the court system, such that it was not open to every person, and speedy remedies could not be afforded.

Section 17. Due process of law. No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

The governor deprived us of liberty to move about, and did it without due process of law. There was no court case here that resulted in our liberty being taken away. It was by executive fiat.

Section 34. Unenumerated rights. The enumeration in this constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny, impair, or disparage others retained by the people.

This section, and a couple of the ones above, can be used to make the case that I have a right to do what is best for my own health. And if I think that wearing a mask is detrimental to my health—which I do—my civil rights are violated by the decree that I must wear the mask.

This governor has defied at least these 12 sections of the Declaration of Rights in the Montana Constitution. Further, his edicts themselves are overstepping, as he has no authority to write laws. The Montana Constitution vests legislative power only in the Legislature, and not in the Executive:

ARTICLE V. THE LEGISLATURE

Section 1. Power and structure. The legislative power is vested in a legislature consisting of a senate and a house of representatives.

It is not the Governor's place to be decreeing laws. And even if the Legislature pretends to extend their own law-making powers to the Government in certain cases, neither the Governor nor the Legislature have the authority to violate the Declaration of Rights.

So, what we have here is a governor, along with some other state officials and the local county health officers, who are themselves violating the spirit of the Living Bible's rendering of Romans 13:1. Remember, that's the version that says "Obey the government."

Well, these government officials are themselves disobeying the very philosophical foundations of our government---both in spirit and in letter.

How is it, then, that I am being charged with wrongdoing on account of dismissing the governor's orders and not wearing the mask?

Even so, millions of us are now being assailed for this same reason—that we will not obey the lawless order.

Even Alexander Hamilton, who wanted the United States to have a very strong central government with a king, and who wanted to undermine sound money for the sake of banker's profits---even this guy wrote the following in Federalist Papers #78, in defense of what the country was supposed to be like under the US Constitution. And you'll have to listen extra-closely, because this is written in language that is both elevated and archaic to us:

There is no position which depends on clearer principles, than that every act of a delegated authority contrary to the tenor of the commission under which it is exercised, is void. No legislative act, therefore, contrary to the constitution, can be valid.
~Alexander Hamilton. Federalist #78.

In other words, if a government body makes a law that is contrary to the spirit of the laws that authorize that governmental body to exist in the first place, that law is void. And as if that weren't clear enough, he finishes in plainer language, "No legislative act, therefore, [*that is*] contrary to the constitution, can be valid."

Well, my governor's acts are contrary to my state's constitution in these 13 ways I have shown you. If just one point of conflict with the constitution would suffice to make such acts void and invalid, then what about 13 points of conflict?

This is a no-brainer, folks. It's a logical and a legal slam dunk. A grand slam, knocked out of the park. It's not even debatable by any honest, rational, and responsible means that the governor has any right whatsoever to violate these very principles about which he swore an oath in front of witnesses, and in front of God himself.

Here's the oath the Montana governor takes:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support, protect and defend the constitution of the United States, and the constitution of the state of Montana, and that I will discharge the duties of my office with fidelity (so help me God)."

Interestingly, I've searched for about half an hour and cannot find any audio or video of Governor Bullock taking the oath either time. I don't know what to make of that, but I'm just mentioning it for the record.

But what is so tragic here—besides the fact that a man like this governor can become so twisted and lawless, and so entitled in his own mind to do as he pleases, despite our laws and his oath to it---what is so tragic here is that so very many people are so utterly ignorant as not to perceive the wrong in what

he has done. They are simply uneducated in their own country's and state's laws. And furthermore, they are very likely manipulated into this position further by psychological operations and other emotional considerations.

I'm referring to the reported threat presented by COVID-19, which I believe has been grossly exaggerated in many ways by unscrupulous players in the health care industry, as well as in the media, and in government at various levels, from the county to the White House. COVID-19 has been puffed up into something that's reputation is many, many times more dangerous than the actual disease really is. And please be responsible and note for the record that I did not say that no such disease exists, or that it is not at all dangerous. No, I said that its dangerous have been grossly exaggerated—and this has been done for political ends.

And on that note, it is very important that you understand that I am neither a Republican nor a Democrat. Nor do I belong to any other political party. And I did not vote for Trump and I did not vote for Clinton. Nor did I vote for Bush or Obama. So if you want to spin what I'm saying here, you're going to have to work extra hard to pass it off as mere political bias on my part.

So, if we're going to run with the traditional "Obey the government" paradigm, then is it only us who have to play by that rule ("obey the government")? Or does the governor have to play by that rule, too? Does The Living Bible say "Obey the government, unless you're in the government?" Or, "Obey the government, unless you're the governor?"

I, for one, don't see what telling the Christians in the First Century to obey their overseeing congregational angel has to do with telling Americans in 2020 to obey their lawless, oath-breaking governors.

Nor do I see God as being the sort who would ever want such a thing.

Indeed, have we not already considered this verse---from the same Paul who wrote so much of the rest of what we've been discussing?:

Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the **fruitless deeds** of darkness, but rather expose them.

If Paul had in mind that the fruitless deeds of darkness done by "the government" were to be exempt from this directive, he had a great opportunity to mention that exemption here.

And let me point out another passage that reveals some more of Paul's philosophy about human rules.

It's from

Colossians 2: ²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, **why**, as though you still belonged to the world, **do you submit to its rules**: ²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on **merely human commands and teachings**. ²³ Such regulations indeed **have an appearance of wisdom**, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

First of all, let me make it abundantly clear that I don't think Paul was talking about COVID-19 here, nor about facemasks, nor about the United States of America, nor about you or me. He was talking to an audience of his contemporaries about things that were directly relevant to them in their own time. But we can learn something here from his dialog. He's telling the Christians that they belong to God, and not to the world, and that they shouldn't necessarily—all things being equal—be feeling any sense of obligations to follow rules whose source are mere humans. But listen to what he says about whichever of those human rules he had in mind when he wrote this. He says they "have an appearance of wisdom".

So let's talk about that. Remember when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees that time, when he said in

John 7:24 Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Well, did the COVID-19 lockdowns and mask-wearing orders appear to some as being wise? Of course they did. But Jesus is the sort to teach people not to go by mere appearances. Rather, he wanted them to judge correctly. And indeed, a great many people DID go by mere appearances—by what they were told by politicians and pundits and experts and such. But how many actually examined it all so as to be able to make a right judgment---or, as Jesus puts it in this particular translation, to "judge correctly"?

I think there are still a great many Christians, even, who haven't yet reached a correct judgment about COVID-19. Here's my summary of how it's been put to the public. It goes something like this:

We're all in this together, and we're working together to save the vulnerable from this terrible, terrible disease, and we each have to do our part, and if we don't, there's something morally wrong with us, and we should be ashamed of ourselves---and if we don't comply, well, there may well be legal penalties—fines and such—but if we were really good people, we wouldn't need any of that because it's just as obvious as it could possibly be that now is the time for these extreme measures. Obey the government.

Well, stuff like that sure sounds compelling to a lot of people, but can it all stand up to examination? For example, can it pass the balance test? Here, let me spell this out in a made-up conversation?

Billy: Boy, this COVID-19 is really deadly, and we have just got to go all-out to fight this thing, because it's killing way too many people!

Larry: So when something's this deadly, we have to go all out to fight it?

Billy: Yep.

Larry: Uh, aren't the COVID-19 numbers in the same ballpark as the flu numbers?

Billy: Yeah, I've heard that.

Larry: Well, if the flu is in the same ballpark of danger and deadliness as COVID-19, then don't we need to go all-out to stop the flu, too?

Billy: Yeah, I guess.

Larry: Then why aren't the same officials who are pushing for an all-out "war" against COVID-19 also pushing for similar measures against the flu?

Billy: Uh...

Larry: And where's the push against the other big killers like heart disease and diabetes?

Billy: Uh...

That discussion shows that the response to COVID-19 is inordinate. It's out of order---that is, it's extremely amplified over what we do to fight any other disease---even ones that kill more people. And so suddenly, all the arguments for the great COVID-19 campaign come under question. Is this really about "saving lives"?

No, not really. It's about political motives.

And you'll find this same kind of inordinate quality to many of the popular movements that various entities are trying to promote. They'll say it's about the one thing---and "saving lives" is a popular one", but it could be about something else---but when you start examining how it runs and what it does and who's involved and how they go about their business, and what their track record is, you can often discover that if it's about saving lives, it's only really about saving SOME people's lives. Or if it's about righting wrongs, it's only really about righting SOME wrongs, even while committing other wrongs in the process. Or if it's supposedly about equality, there's a lot of inequality planned into the scheme.

And it often becomes a threatening match from the various claxon cultures. If you don't give us what we want, we'll make a big fuss. And they go off like a claxon---like that warning buzzer on a ship, or on Star Trek, And we're all supposed to not like all the noise and the ruckus, so we're supposed to give in to whatever are their demands.

So lots of people do give in, and then the ones who don't are a huge aggravant to them. Why can't you people just give in? Why can't you just bow the knee? Why can't you just wear the mask? Why can't you just disavow the so-called "white privilege" that you don't think you have? And the claxon keeps going off---and people get more and more upset. More and more appalled at the whole thing. More and more upset over what happened to their country, and where normalcy went.

And that's what time it is in America right now. And there are many millions of people who are helping this current communist coup---even though they don't know they're helping. Big corporations, for instance, who are pandering to the thug culture so they don't lose customers, are actually promoting the thug culture. Corporations doing what their attorneys and insurers tell them, and mandating the masks, are helping the governors to violate their Constitutions. And they're also making people sick, because wearing a mask is not a healthy practice.

Interestingly, the Montana Sheriffs Association issued a statement on July 17, 2020, saying:

The statewide face covering order is a public health directive. It is not a mandate for law enforcement to issue citations and arrest violators."

Read More: [Montana Sheriffs: Mask Mandate is Not Enforceable](https://newstalk955.com/montana-sheriffs-mask-mandate-is-not-enforceable/?trackback=fbshare_mobile&fbclid=IwAR3wN-EmDc80bhQSG1XHkTB9NKXytw82vN9cX584xSfzrTHG9Qy22sp_lXM&utm_source=tsmclip&utm_medium=referral) |

https://newstalk955.com/montana-sheriffs-mask-mandate-is-not-enforceable/?trackback=fbshare_mobile&fbclid=IwAR3wN-EmDc80bhQSG1XHkTB9NKXytw82vN9cX584xSfzrTHG9Qy22sp_lXM&utm_source=tsmclip&utm_medium=referral

So, if you're still into believing that Paul meant to convey the message "Obey the government", what do you do when the government doesn't obey the government? That is, what do you do when the sheriffs tell the government that he doesn't have a constitutional leg to stand on?

Whose word do you need before you will believe that the governor has transgressed the very Constitution that creates his own office? If the words of the Constitution—which I have shown you—are not enough—and if the word of the Sheriffs Association is not enough---then what do you need?

When I talked about millions of Americans playing out the rules as unwitting accomplices to the lawless coup, one of the things I had in mind are all those particular Christians who are telling other Christians that they're in sin for disobeying the governors' lawless orders.

This is exactly the sort of mindless conviction that makes today's churches so philosophically different from the philosophy of Jesus and his First-Century ekklesia.

I have shown you evidence from the texts---lots and lots of evidence---and I've given you lots to think about. And if you don't like any of this, and if you want to keep on with the traditional idea that Paul demands that we obey lawless governors, just how are you going to manage that? Are you just going to be flagrant and say, "I don't care about all these facts; I want to believe what I want to believe, and I still insist that you people are in sin for not wearing the masks."

Is that how you're going to handle it?

Well, OK, then. But don't expect honest, rational, and responsible Christians to line up at your door asking you for advice on how to live. You, dear Christian, are the reason we can't have anything nice. You are the ones who excuse tyranny and chicanery—and do it in the name of God—counseling fellow believers not to do anything about what ails this country. And the sad, sad fact is that your fellow believers—the ones you're trying to dissuade from reforming our body politic to a better state of existence—are not well-equipped to see the error in your argument—just like you aren't, either.

But this kind of low-level intellectual existence is not what Jesus had in mind for believers. Nor is the low-level moral and social existence that so many Christians have come to believe is supposed to be "normal" for us. Remember, Jesus was the one at which they marveled, saying, "He has done all things well!"

That kind of behavior, apparently, was not common in their day. But now that Jesus and his deeds have been published worldwide, shouldn't there be a great many Christians emulating him in his excellence? With such a high percentage of Americans claiming Christ, shouldn't this country be on the high side of morality, and shouldn't public corruption be on the low side?

Of course, it should. But like I said earlier, a lot of people here have got themselves a twisted Jesus from somewhere---and not the actual Jesus of the Bible record. And so many are so tragically content with that.

Others, however, are more inclined to want their religion—and their Jesus—to make sense. They want it all to add up. They want it to be reasonable. They don't want to be stopped from pursuing evidence, just because Sister Sally at church says they ought to back off in their political convictions. And I submit that the REAL Jesus—the one in the Bible, with all the facts and details that constitute that record---I submit that the REAL Jesus does want us to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good---to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but to expose them for what they are---to not judge by mere appearances, but to judge correctly---to not be taken in by fine-sounding arguments---and to not be shamed into denying ourselves of what is rightfully and naturally ours. He said of himself—and we're going to talk about this soon in an upcoming episode---“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

How, then, can a follower of this amazing God-Man, not be fully committed to the truth in all matters? How can a follower of Jesus simply decide not to care about the truth in the scriptures?

Jesus was not popular with everyone. John told his audience why some were not satisfied with Jesus:

John 3: ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Christians who try to get other Christians to give tyrants and scoundrels in office a pass to keep doing what they're doing---they don't understand Jesus. You can't have the kindness of God without the sternness of God. You can't have grace without responsibility. You can't have blessings without duty. You can't have holiness without repentance.

So many will try to avoid dealing with what's really going on in this country, and they'll do it by use of religious arguments—mostly one-liners that try to shut down examination. Some of them will talk about the mystery of why God wouldn't (supposedly) want Christians to play a godly role in their own government. “It's a mystery, bro!” And some put things off into the indefinite future with things like, “Farther along, we'll know all about it.” Or they pretend that one day, Jesus will come down here and fix it all FOR us. We used to sing a song about that at one church I went to. It said “Troubles in my way, gotta pray sometime---don't you know that my Jesus, he will fix it.” But political troubles have gone on in this country for centuries so far, and to date, Jesus has NOT fixed it. They'll tell you things like, “Don't worry about it, bro; God is large and in charge!” But God doesn't seem to be running this country—and if you think he is, you have quite underestimated the excellence of God's character if you think he is responsible for this mess! They'll say “Pray for our country”, and to that, I always ask, “what, exactly, are we to be asking?” Am I supposed to ask that God will simply kill the bad guys who undermine justice and order and sound government? If not that, then what? That he will force them to change their thinking about such things? Or that he will magically erase their undermining work, such that it no longer has any traceable effect? What, exactly, are we supposed to be praying for? That God will come down here and do the work that we ourselves continually neglect to do to straighten this country out? That God will change the hearts of people that we ourselves are afraid to discuss things with?

Jesus' disciples one day saw a great crowd that needed to eat, and they said to Jesus, "Lord, send them away so that they can get something to eat." But he surprised them by saying, "YOU give them something to eat." And I think a lot of Christians will be very surprised to learn that Jesus will ask them why they didn't do more themselves to make the world around them better while they were here.

Please, dear Christian, give careful thought to your ways. And if you have misunderstood Romans 13, and have told other Christians that they're in sin over disobeying lawless governors, go tell them you were wrong, and ask their forgiveness. The fact of the matter is that your misunderstanding in this matter has actually helped those who are trying to destabilize our country. But now that we've straightened it out, you can confidently take a stand, alongside your fellow believers, and help turn this country around.

And on that note, I'm going to close by suggesting that you go listen to an essay I recently recorded as a video on YouTube. It's called "American Fire by Jack Pelham", and it's about 8 minutes long. It talks about a particular mixture of philosophical ideas that, when mixed together in one mind, make something I call American Fire---it's what drove so many of the founders of our country to try to build a good country. They were not perfect, of course—just as we are not perfect. But the essay asks the question about what's keeping US from picking up those founding principles and taking them farther on our watch than they did on theirs.

So please give it a listen at [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com). You'll have to search these words to find it: American Fire by Jack Pelham (that's P-e-l-h-a-m).

So that completes this topic.

Thanks for joining in.