

A Christian Response to Recent Protests

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The barricades are up. On one side there are police with riot shields and their weapons. On the other side, there are students in their 20's with their black T-shirts and umbrellas. Both sides are facing each other in the hot sun. Confrontations like this are not only on the streets, but on social media, living rooms, bars, and churches, as onlookers are asking each other the repeated question: "Whose side are you on?"

Their answers have led to both alliance and division. You will find youthful students singing together with elderly supporters. Yet you will also find church friends tearfully shouting to each other, "I will never speak to you again!" It is in this confusing sea of both singing and anger, grandmothers and gangsters, tears of joy and tears from gas, that we find our anchor in the Word of God.

Speak up for justice. God is always on the side of justice. Moses said, "All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). For this reason, God instructs His people to "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82:3, 4). Prophets, as should the Church, exposed the injustices of their day: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground... You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos 5:7-12). In the same prophetic tradition, John the Baptist spoke up against the tyrannical Herod the tetrarch, the corrupted ruler of his day when he said to Herod about his brother's wife, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (Matthew 14:3-5). Also Jesus, in his prophetic role, frequently lashed out at the religious leaders of His day, even one time exclaiming, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46).

Because justice is the character of God, Christians need to exercise their prophetic voice and speak to promote justice today. The freedom to worship, freedom of speech, freedom of the press for all – these are some of the ideals that Christians should stand up for, not only for themselves, but the good of society and to promote the Christian life and service. Christians should also speak out against all forms of corruption, immorality, atheism, and oppression.

In some countries, this will get you arrested. This was the case in World War II under the Third Reich, when churches shrank back from speaking up against Adolf Hitler.

Churches must never make that mistake again. Those Christians who did speak out, such as pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, suffered imprisonment leading to death, after his outspoken resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, and opposition to Hitler's euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews.

Freedom of speech is a gift. It was rarely found in the ancient societies of Jesus' day. All Jesus had to say was "before Abraham was born, I am!" and His opposers picked up stones to kill him. He was executed because of what He said about Himself (John 19:7). Yet today, there is some degree of speech freedom in Hong Kong. If you are in a region that protects the freedom of speech, consider it an opportunity from God, and speak with wisdom, respect, and effectiveness. Christians in such countries have frequently used this gift to speak out on such issues as slavery, abortion, apartheid, euthanasia, greed, oppression, and sexual immorality. If the issues surrounding the recent protests in Hong Kong involve moral injustices, then speak up and speak out.

Promote truth. Like justice, God is always on the side of truth. It is why "Every word of God proves true" (Prov. 30:5), and "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Therefore, we must do everything we can to promote truth, and resist editorial spins, rumor, prejudice, and jumping to conclusions.

There are some conflicting reports. The police reports on their website state that the protestors were violent, yet there are photos of students responsibly cleaning up their trash and singing songs. And there are student claims that the protestors were completely peaceful, holding up their hands to show that they were unarmed, yet there were 12 policemen that needed to be sent to the hospital for injuries. So within the tangled web of information, half-truths, and emotional rhetoric, the truth is waiting to be revealed and promoted.

Be lawful. God calls each one of us to "submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which is established by God" (Romans 13:1-7). 1 Peter 2:13 says, "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." The only exception to this rule is if obedience to human law puts us in direct disobedience to God's law, then, civil disobedience is warranted. Examples of this is when the ancient Hebrews broke Egyptian law by letting infant boys live (Exodus 1), the early church defied orders to worship the Roman emperor, and defied religious authorities to keep quiet about Jesus (Acts 4:19-20). But if human law does not require us to break God's law, then God compels us to conform to the laws of the land of which we are earthly citizens.

God Himself is "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). If we do engage in any battles, whether political or spiritual, it should be only as a step towards peace and order. Chaos and anarchy are never acceptable outcomes in God's eyes.

Be careful about the human tendency towards lawlessness. The Bible calls this sin (Romans 3:10-18). It is like an inflatable beach ball – no matter how much you try to suppress it underwater, it will keep floating up to the surface. So whether you are young or old, police or protestor, we all have the tendency to rebel. We're all born with it. When people say to you, "it is the only way," or "your enemies need to be paid back," or "everybody's doing it," or "this is the way things are done" – these could perhaps be veiled attempts to disguise sin.

Your ultimate aim is Christocracy. There is a reason why you will find few, if any, references to a democracy in the Bible. Christians are to strive for a Christocracy, where we are to "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..." (Col. 3:15). Paul instructs, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). That is, one's faith in Christ should exemplify God's rule and Christ's Lordship over all areas of life. So, as Christians, we should seek the transformation of art, music, architecture, engineering, and yes, politics, so that the world would echo what the Queen of Sheba exclaimed when she saw the splendor, wisdom, and artistry of Solomon – "Praise be to the Lord your God!" (1 Kings 10:9). All of the Christian's work should reflect the glory of God, and proclaim the fact that He is "over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6). Therefore, Christians should be actively involved in politics, as in science, art, and humanities, in order to live out Christ's influence in each of these spheres of life. Any support for democracy, and the freedoms it offers, then, should be seen not as our goal, but as a stepping stone towards the ultimate Christocracy.

Put your hope in the power of the gospel. The Bible speaks of transforming powers that the world knows nothing about: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16). Through the Holy Spirit, poverty was eliminated (Acts 4:34). An angel of the Lord struck down an unpopular and self-serving tyrant (Acts 12:23). God converted a ruthless dictator (Daniel 4). The Holy Spirit brought together the population of an entire city (Acts 13:44).

What society needs is a genuine revival of God. It is no accident that the great movements of God in history were far reaching unto societal transformation. The Reformation of the 1500's brought about a great departure from the hierarchical governance of the Catholic Church and the monarchies of Europe. The Great Awakening of the 1740's and 1820's paved the way for the abolition of slavery and prison reform in the United States and England. The missionary movements of the early 1900's brought the establishment of medical schools and universities in Asia. When enough people are changed by the power of God, then whole societies change.

Summary: Pray. Oppose all evil, both that which is in "them" and that which is in you. Preach Christ.