

Dear members and friends of St. John,

A great amount of media attention has been given to **professional athletes who refuse to stand for the National Anthem of the United States**. Kneeling, instead of standing, is apparently a visual form of protest against injustices in American society and government.

**How should Christians respond to such protests?** Does the Bible give us insight into our responsibilities (and included in these, how we show respect) for those in authority over us? This is a complicated, multifaceted issue.

Let's begin with **civil resistance to authority**. Immediately after Christ's ascension into heaven, the Apostles boldly began to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Jerusalem Temple. What was the result of these proclamations: many people came to faith in Jesus! But, the ruling authorities were disturbed. It was apparent to many that their leaders in fact executed a plan that killed the Messiah! In an attempt to silence them, the leaders told the Apostles to stop preaching the truth. The Apostles refused, telling the authorities, *"We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him"* (Acts 5:19-30).

So, it's clear that **we must stand in defiance of any governing authority that prohibits us from following what we are instructed and taught by God**. Civil disobedience is required when laws are enacted that go against God's clear teachings. But civil disobedience must be done peacefully, directly addressing the injustice (or law), and **not** by slandering or stirring up hatred toward the leaders.

**Christians are also instructed to obey governing authorities**, even those who are not openly Christian. We must even obey when what is demanded of us seems unfair, or unjust. We read from Romans chapter 13: *"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 judgment"* (vv. 1-2). So, we follow all laws, and if we believe we have been unjustly or unfairly treated, there are legal remedies that our government has provided for us: civil courts that allow for personal grievances to be heard. We have elected officials that can be contacted if we believe that there are laws or statues that are unfair or unjust. Under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, we can petition the government if we'd like our governing officials to address specific issues that are deemed unfair. Also, under that same Amendment, we can publicly (although peaceably) protest.

**So, how should we respond to sports figures kneeling during the National Anthem?** As Christians, we know that we must be careful to **not simply condemn the entire government** (for it was instituted by God), **nor create or promote public dissension** that may lead to violence or attacks on public officials. Sports figures or elected leaders who condemn our government in general, or stir up dissension are sinning against God, and will be held accountable by Him. They must **repent**.

Are these **National Anthem protests** directed against the government in **general**? Are they directed against **individual politicians** whom they disagree with, and want to see removed from office? Remember, we have Godly and legal pathways that we can take if we want to protest unfair laws, injustice, or to remove errant elected officials from office. Civil disobedience to simply stir up hatred and dissent is **not Godly**, and must be condemned by the Church.

However, if sports figures (and others) make it clear WHY they are kneeling; if it is clear WHY they want specific laws or injustices addressed; if they PUBLICLY DENOUNCE acts of hatred and violence against those in authority – then, good Christians **must** support their right to publicly protest. **The significant issue I see here is found in the vagueness or uncertainty of their reason for protesting.** To many, it appears they are condemning the United States government in general (a sin), or are using this to create dissent against the President of the United States (also a sin).

Ultimately, **public sin** leads us to recognize that **we, too, sin often.** We cannot stand upright before God, claiming we are perfect at keeping His Law. Jesus was arrested and stood before government officials. He didn't condemn them publicly (although they were sinning) because His Father had put them in positions of authority – for His purposes. They did what was most evil – they condemn an honest and perfectly upright man to death, for sins that He did not commit. He went to the cross and died with our sin, for every time we have hated from our heart, and sought to hurt others. He rose on Easter morning so that we too can escape death, and live with Him forever!

And now, **our God expects us to lead others to see their sin and repent of them.** Our God wants us to love our neighbor so completely that we will **confront them when they sin publicly.** When they acknowledge their sin, we are to **share the forgiveness that God has for all who are repentant.** Remember what Peter and the Apostles said to the public leaders: “*The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom **you killed** by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to **give repentance** to Israel and **forgiveness of sins.**” The Apostles desired that even these officials, who successfully executed a plan to kill Jesus, would come to repentance and live! We must love our enemies, as our Lord has demonstrated, by being willing to even die for them!*

**Prayer** should be our response to what may or may not be **public sin** (in people kneeling during the National Anthem). **Pray** that the protesters would make it clear **what** they are protesting. **Pray** that the protesters would **publicly denounce civil violence** directed against civil authorities. **Pray** that the protesters may **see their sin**, and **repent.** Pray that the **very message of forgiveness, in Jesus' name, would come to them.** **Pray** that **they may join us in seeking to follow our Savior's direction,** and **carry out the good works he has for us.**

Pastor Travis