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Two different approaches to compliance and obedience

In a world where authority often demands compliance and obedience, Christians believe there exists two very different systems, both seek allegiance. There are the kingdoms of this world, which I will refer to as the state, and the Kingdom of God. A profound dichotomy exists between the methods employed by the state and the way God calls for relational allegiance. The state demands obedience through power. In contrast, God extends the invitation to follow Him through Agape love. Agape love is considered the highest form of love encompassing God's love for humanity and the love of humans for God. It is unconditional, selfless, sacrificial, a love that is a choice and never coercive.

The state, as the institution of governance established by God, relies on structures of control to maintain order. Its power, vested in law enforcement and penal systems, frequently imposes consequences for disobedience. Romans 13:1-4 highlights this dynamic: "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..." Here, Paul acknowledges the role of authority in maintaining order but highlights an important aspect: the state's obedience is demanded and often extracted through coercive means.

In stark contrast to the coercive methods of state power, God's approach to obedience is profoundly rooted in love. God desires a relationship with humanity that is not based on fear or obligation but on genuine love and choice. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 states, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days..." God lays before humanity the choice between life and death, blessing and curse, reinforcing that true obedience is contingent upon love and a desire for relationship, rather than mere compliance.

Jesus exemplified this model of obedience rooted in love. In John 14:15, He states, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." So as not to leave any in doubt Jesus defines the two greatest commandments in Matthew 22: 37-40, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Jesus framed obedience as a response

to love rather than an obligation imposed by authority. God, in His infinite wisdom, understands that true obedience emerges not from coercion but from a heart transformed by love.

The coercive nature of state power often leads to compliance devoid of true freedom. In contrast, when individuals respond to God's love, they develop a desire to live according to His ways—not out of fear of punishment but out of gratitude and reverence. This ethical response, born of profound love and relationship, fosters true obedience and a passion for pursuing righteousness. Great movements of societal reform continue to originate from this selfless, sacrificial love exhibited by those called to be engaged citizens bringing salt and light to a decaying and darkened world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The danger for Christians is they can become entangled in the politics of the world and forget that their ultimate allegiance lies with the Kingdom of God. Staying on mission requires discernment, ensuring that their actions reflect love, grace and the teachings of Jesus rather than the fleeting politics of the state.

The comparison between the state's demand for obedience through force and God's invitation to respond to love illustrates a profound truth. While the state uses power to maintain order, God offers a loving relationship that breeds genuine obedience. In a world often driven by fear, the Christian witness calls for a radical transformation where love reigns supreme, inviting others to experience true freedom. In embracing God's love, we reflect the character of Christ—an embodiment of love, grace, and perfect authority into the human experience.