

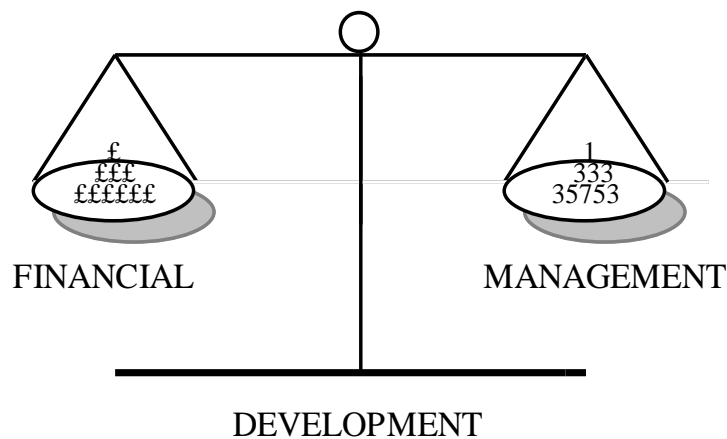
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

CHRISTIAN MANAGEMENT

NO 908

LIVING WITHIN THE LAW (LIVING IN THE SPIRIT WITHIN THE LAW)

Can it be right to do wrong?



ONE OF A SERIES OF GUIDES FOR
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

FROM

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This is one of a series of documents produced by David A Palmer as a guide for managers on specific financial topics to assist informed discussion. Readers should take appropriate advice before acting upon any of the issues raised.

LIVING WITHIN THE LAW

(LIVING IN THE SPIRIT WITHIN THE LAW)

This paper is designed to help YOU

- Consider the need for legitimate authority
- Reflect on circumstances when compliance is difficult
- Consider how to plan prayer into what we do and say
- Consider how to act with God's help in specific situations

And so be more ready and able to only challenge authority when it is right to do so and with a view to helping to bring about God's Kingdom on earth.

THE LAW AND THE SPIRIT

"The letter of the Law brings death, but the Spirit brings Life." (2 Corinthians 3:6) We are ministers of the new covenant, written on our hearts not on stone or paper. As Christians we should strive to exceed the legal requirements of a secular world and by so doing, demonstrate the power of the love of Christ. In a world beset by red tape, acronyms and inspecting bodies, how should we react to Audits, OFSTED, Sarbanes-Oxley, Child Protection Regulations, Political Correctness, etc; how do we discern the just from the unjust?

Concentrating on practical examples in a work (and church) context this paper looks at Biblical precedent and Church teaching for "doing what they tell you" and consider the practicalities of how to pray for ourselves, the law makers and implementers. The first workshop will look at some guidelines, the second will aim to consider real issues and pray into them. "Everyone is to obey the governing authority, because there is no authority except from God." (Romans 13:1) "Authority is exercised legitimately if it is committed to the common good of society." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1921) An unjust law is a "kind of violence". (St Thomas Aquinas). We are called to be in this messy world, not of it. Help!

THE LAW IS THE LAW IS THE LAW

GOD'S LAW IS PARAMOUNT

The Psalms are fairly clear about the Law:

Psalm 1:2 "Blessed is the one who delights in God's Law."

Psalm 19:7 "The Law of the Lord is Perfect"

Psalm 119:97 "How I love your Law"

The Law of God is clearly set out in Scripture. God is Loving, but he is also Holy and Just. God knows we fickle human beings need laws, rules, regulations, etc. to keep us in check, to help us avoid sin and the occasions of sin. We need protection from ourselves, from others and from the natural world which we corrupted in the Garden of Eden. In James 1:25 it says "Anyone who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and keeps to it - not listening and forgetting, but putting it into practice - will be blessed in every undertaking."

In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them."

Jesus came to give us life to the full by bringing us freedom under the law. As we once were in Genesis, we will one day be free to "eat of all the trees" ...but one. Law brings freedom. The law states we should drive on the left (or the right if abroad!) and thus we are free to drive much faster.

HUMAN LAWS ARE TO BE OBEYED TOO

Jesus seems to want us to conform to secular laws and customs as well as God's law. In Matthew 3:13-17 John argues that Jesus does not need Baptism. Jesus says "Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should in this way do all that uprightness demands."

In Luke's Gospel Jesus was obedient to the "law" even when it was arguably not the right thing to do:

2:1-5 Joseph (and Mary carrying Jesus) went to Bethlehem in accordance with Caesar's decree. (A 100 mile hike when you are pregnant!!)

2:21-40 Jesus was circumcised in accordance with the Law. (Dedicating a baby to God is fine but does it make sense when the baby is God?)

2:51 After the finding in the Temple he went and lived under his parents' authority. (He was meant to be about God the Father's business saving souls not learning woodworking!)

He even wants us to exceed the requirements of the secular law. Matthew 6:41 "If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him." Jesus was the model of obedience - even unto death.

In 1 Peter 2:20 it says "Slaves you should obey your masters respectfully, not only those who are kind and reasonable, but also those who are difficult to please." In 3:14 it says "No one can hurt you if you are determined to do only what is right." St Paul says "Slaves obey your masters" in Ephesians 6. In Hebrews 13:17 it says "Obey your leaders and give way to them: they watch over your souls because they must give an account of them."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in Article 2238 states "Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts."

It is easy to say that all we have to do to be good citizens, good Christians or even good Catholics... is to do exactly what we are told to do.

The Nuremberg defence is OK. "We are only following orders."

If only life were that "simple".....We would be robots. Every day we are beset by conflicting orders from different forms of authority. What do we do when Church and State disagree, when our employer asks us to work on a Sunday, when we are ordered to lie, steal, kill?

Note that Jesus was crucified "according to the Law" (John 19:7) Was that right? When the Centurion said "Truly this was an upright man." (Luke 23:47) and "In truth this man was Son of God." (Mark 15:39) would he have been right to add "but I am glad that I did my job and obeyed my commander because we must obey our leaders."?

In 1 Timothy 1:8 a caveat is included "We are well aware that the Law is good, but always provided it is used legitimately, on the understanding that laws are not framed for people who are upright.... On the contrary they are for criminals and the insubordinate, the irreligious and the wicked....."

A LAW IS ONLY A LAW WHEN IT IS LEGITIMATE

Is it possible that some things we are told to do are wrong; and therefore following orders might be the wrong thing to do, even a Sin? Surely the Roman Martyrs were right not to sacrifice to the Emperor.

Consider some examples of Jesus and his encounters with the Law in the Gospel of Mark:

2:25-28 The disciples are plucking corn on the Sabbath, the Pharisees complain. Jesus responds with a question: Have you never read what David did?... He ate the loaves of offering (1 Samuel; 21:1-7) when he was hungry. Rules are to help men, not to harm them.

3:1-5 On being confronted with the man with a withered hand he asked "Is it allowed to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath?" Then after he healed the man they plotted to kill him.

3:31-35 Jesus was told his mother wanted him (Honour thy Father and thy Mother?) He asked "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

7:1-23 The Pharisees complained the disciples did not wash before eating. Jesus notes "How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God to preserve your own tradition." It is what is in the heart that matters, not the external regulations.

Sometimes laws are "bent" to accommodate the faint hearted.

10:1-12 Moses allowed divorce "because you were so hard hearted."

Sometimes you make the law yourself.

11:15-33 Jesus cleansed the temple. He took the law into own hands. When asked by whose authority he acted he replied with a question and effectively refused to answer them.

In Mark's Gospel 12:13-17 He confirms that we should "pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." but in 12:28-34 He states that the whole law is summed up in Love God and your neighbour.

So that is the answer "Obey the law unless you feel that it is wrong in which case you can ignore it." (David Palmer April Fool's Day 2012)

But surely that is silly. There is no point in saying I always obey the law, except when I disagree with it. That's like me saying I always agree with my wife, except when I don't. That is not a law! That is lawlessness and a recipe for chaos! If everyone is entitled to their version of the law then there is no law. UK Society is slowly realising this fact of life.

We honour the law by being obedient to it precisely when we obey it when we do not wish to do so. It is self-denial for the greater good of ourselves and others.

Laws normally have a sensible reason for their existence - we may not know it. Sometimes ignoring instructions can have unintended consequences. In Mark 12:40-45 Jesus heals a leper and warns him not to tell anyone. "Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places."

The problem lies in finding a sensible and Godly approach to deciding when we should obey the law and when not; and which laws we should obey and which we should stand up against.

THANK GOD FOR THE CHURCH?

God has given us the Church because circumstances change and we are not robots slavishly following rules. "The letter of the Law brings death, but the Spirit brings Life." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

The Catechism (CCC 2234) sees obedience to civil authority as implied under the Fourth Commandment "Honour thy father and thy mother, so that you may live long in the land God gives you." (Exodus 20:12)

It notes that "Every human community needs an authority to govern it." (CCC 1898) quoting John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* and that "Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions and to devote themselves as far as is necessary to work and care for the good of all." (CCC 1897)

It follows the argument that St Paul advances in 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 he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement."

However the Church notes that ultimately we are responsible for our own actions. We can even disagree with the Church, if our conscience tells us to, although we need to have ensured our conscience is well formed. CCC 1782 states that Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."

The catechism sets out some ground rules:

1902 Authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself. It must not behave in a despotic manner, but must act for the common good as a "moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility." quoting Aquinas as saying "A human law has the character of law to the extent that it accords with right reason, and thus derives from the eternal law. Insofar as it falls short of right reason it is said to be an unjust law, and thus has not so much the nature of law as of a kind of violence."

1903 Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it. If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience. In such a case, "authority breaks down completely and results in shameful abuse."

It goes on to note that the good of the individual is related to the Common Good "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily." It states this consists of three elements:

1. Respect for the Individual - including the natural freedoms of the rights to:
life, to act in accordance with conscience, privacy, religious freedom, etc.
2. Prosperity - the well-being and development of the group itself - making accessible to each food, clothing, health, work, education culture, information etc.
3. Peace including security and legitimate personal and collective defence

It notes that the complexity of society implies a "universal common good". However in its Compendium of Social Doctrine (397) the Church specifically states that any authority must recognise, respect and promote essential human values. These are not to be determined by majority vote but are written on our hearts (as it says in Romans 2:15). "If as a result of the tragic clouding of the collective conscience, scepticism were to succeed in casting doubt on the basic principles of the moral law, the legal structure of the State itself would be shaken to its very foundations, being reduced to nothing more than a mechanism for the pragmatic regulation of different and opposing interests."

So how are we to decide what to do in difficult cases?

TO LIVE IS TO LEARN (YOU STOP LEARNING WHEN YOU DIE)

At times in our lives we are faced with decisions which involve consideration of law breaking. On a religious level God asks us to "bear our breasts, not bend our backs". When we are called to respond to God with an almost insane gift of self, we prefer grudging submission. We try to be just, to offer what is due to God and to our neighbour. Yet as long as such "justice" contains none of the leaven of love, it is no better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. **Submitting** oneself in place of **giving** oneself is a desperate effort. A spirit that is not given in love remains centred on self, and this self-centred state is a kind of Sin." (Fr Moline in From the struggle of Jacob).

At all times in our lives we must try to obey the Spirit of the Law, even sometimes to the extent of breaking the Law. It is illegal to stop on a motorway..... but should you drive past on the other side if someone is lying injured on the road? Luke 10: 29:37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan) shows us that love of our neighbour should override all other concerns.

Life is not easy.....It wouldn't be any fun if it wasn't. We need help to make decisions.

In particular we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-3:

Wisdom	To judge what is right to do and what is not
Understanding	To analyse the situation and the factors and people involved
Counsel	To choose what is right, despite conflicting feelings and opinions
Fortitude	To be brave and patient when dealing with others
Knowledge	To see God's hand at work in all things
Piety	To love and reverence God and all people (including ourselves) as his creation
Fear of the Lord	To desire to please God in all we do

Paul's Letter to Titus 2:15 - 3:2 "This is what you must say, encouraging or arguing with full authority, no one should despise you. Remind them to be obedient to the officials in authority; to be ready to do good at every opportunity; not to go slandering people but to be peaceable and gentle and always polite to people of all kinds."

As Christians we are called to be salt and light in the world and sometimes salt can sting and light can irritate.

We need to be sure we are right, and perhaps the best place to start is to ensure we are right with God. In Luke 6:39 Jesus tells us to take the log out of our eyes before we attempt to take the speck out of our brother's eye. We are not God and in Matthew 7:1 it says **"Judge not lest you be judged."**

Later we will consider how we should act based on the Why, What, Who, Where, When, and How Approach. A quick approach might be to consider the following:

Is what I am being asked to do really wrong? Or is the rule just really just different from the way I would have framed it.

What was the intention of those who framed the law? Were their intentions honourable?
Am I following what they would wish me to do rather than what they have told me to do?
What would they do if they were here now?

Is there a need to speak out to get the rules changed? Is a prayerful silence and acceptance of the law as "my cross to bear" the best option?

Who is being hurt if I follow the rule: Me, Them, Someone else, God?

Will breaking the law encourage others to do so wrongly?

Doing nothing is never the appropriate option - Prayer is always appropriate. God can bring Good out of all circumstances.

THE SPIRIT BRINGS LIFE

Above we have established that laws are necessary. Not just God's laws but secular laws like the Highway Code because human society functions better if we all conform to agreed regulations. We all agree that it is a good idea if Doctors have to be trained before they are let loose on the public and we trust that there are bodies who monitor their competence. However, it is obvious from Scripture that sometimes it is acceptable to break laws and the Church in the Catechism allows for individual conscience to have the right to override even its own teaching, although it does not say the individual would be right to do so. Having a right to do something does not mean you are always right to exercise that right. Right?

This leaves the problem of how to deal with laws where we felt there was a case for disobedience. Let's look at the practicalities of what we might say and do in various situations.

The Catechism states CCC 1786 states:

Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgement in accordance with reason and the divine law, or on the contrary, an erroneous judgement that departs from them.

It does however say that some rules apply in every case:

One may never do evil so that good may result from it;

The Golden rule - Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them;

Charity always proceeds by way of respect for one's neighbour and his conscience: "Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience.....you sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:12) Therefore it is right not todo anything that makes your brother stumble." (Romans 14:21)

We are not robots and life is constantly changing. Even the Church can change its mind. Up to the 1930's Catholics were forbidden to say the Our Father with other Christians. Now ecumenical prayer is positively encouraged.

Is lying ever acceptable? Rehab lied to protect people in Joshua 3:4 and was commended for her faith in God in Hebrews 11:31.

The Catechism notes 2488-2492 looks at this point "The right to the communication of the truth is not unconditional." Love might suggest it is not appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. "The good and safety of others, respect for privacy, and the common good are sufficient reasons for being silent about what ought not be known or for making use of a discreet language. The duty to avoid scandal often commands strict discretion. No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it." Ecclesiasticus 27:16 "A betrayer of secrets forfeits all trust." Proverbs 25:9 "Do not disclose another's secret." Professionals should only disclose confidential information when keeping silent would cause harm to others. Everyone should respect other people's privacy.

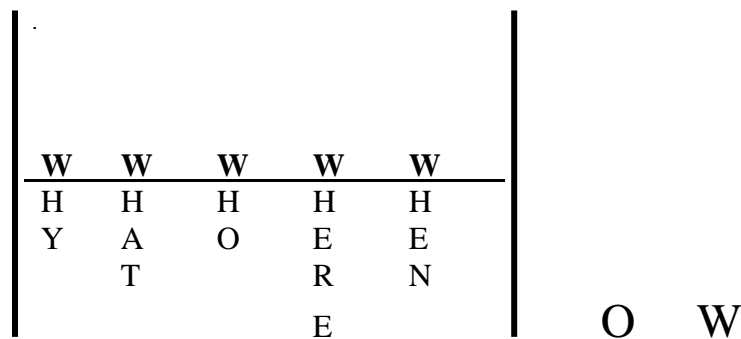
AN APPROACH TO HELP CONSIDER THE RIGHT THING TO DO

Proverbs 16:3 "Commend your works to the Lord and your plans will succeed." This does not mean that we tell God what we are going to do and then ask Him to bless it. It means we should prayerfully ask God to guide us as we consider what we should do in given situations.

Grudging acquiescence and grumbling is one thing, but there are times when you have to prayerfully consider whether you need to speak out about something to an individual or a group. As usual it helps to have a process to clarify one's thought and establish the best way forward. God expects us to use our talents including our abilities to plan and analyse. You want your children to learn to do things for themselves - so does God.

As with any activity it is helpful to have a process to consider how to take action.

Five Seagulls on a Rugby Post:



In all circumstances WWJD is helpful "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? Let's look at each in turn:

Why - was the rule set up and why do I want to change/ignore it
 If the intention of the law is dishonourable then it is probably reasonable to break it.
 However, rules are normally brought in to help someone. Is the law primarily there:
 To provide a deterrent to potential wrongdoers?
 To allow the rule maker to know that their wishes are being followed?
 To ensure segregation of duties to protect in case of subsequent error?
 To encourage better behaviour in us or in others
 To help someone learn so that they will be better prepared for the future.
 What consequence is the law trying to prevent or cause?

What - Are the options
 What are the possible options and what are the harmful impacts of each course of action?
 Make sure you have the facts. It is important that you do not rely on hearsay. The witnesses at the trials of Susannah, Jesus and Stephen were all corrupt.

Be clear about the outcome you want to achieve. The emphasis should be on specific dangers from the bad behaviour and if possible include the benefits of good behaviour. Always try to be constructive and be prepared to defend your viewpoint. If it was front page news tomorrow, would you feel pleased or ashamed? Could you stand before your Maker?

Who - is involved: Us or someone else (including God)

Be comforted (or worried) by the passage in Ezekiel 33 where the watchman is blamed for not warning his countrymen of impending disaster. You need to be sure God has appointed you as the watchman but your role may be to ask someone else to take action. Consider first is there someone else who may be able to counsel you, or who has the Authority to approve deviation from the letter of the Law.

Who made the Law?

Did they have the Authority to do it?

Did they have the knowledge to do it?

Had they foreseen these circumstances?

Who benefits from the Law being applied as it stands?

Who is hurt by the Law being applied as it stands?

Who benefits from the Law not being applied as it stands?

Who is hurt by the Law not being applied as it stands?

"They ought to do something about it" is a phrase which no Christian should utter. "I will Do.....and pray about it." is the better course.

However, do not allow yourself to be like the busybodies in 1 Timothy 5:13 "gossips and meddlers in other people's affairs, saying what should remain unsaid." If your decision is to follow the law and say nothing to the person concerned and not to ask anyone else to do so, then do not go around moaning to others! Prayerful, suffering in silence may be indicated. Read Job chapters 1 to 42. I am only partly joking - 1:13-19 and 2:7-10 help us to put things in perspective and count our blessings rather than our problems.

Where - Here?

There is a place for everything. Neutral territory may be indicated for some discussions. A challenge on the general rule may be easier to discuss than a specific problem; or a specific case may be allowed as an exception (Choose your ground.). Certainly there are many advantages to a private, rather than a public confrontation. However there is a place for both. Paul "confronted Peter to his face" and boasted about it in his letter to the Galatians 2:11 because it needed publicising in order that others should avoid the same error. Some errors or actions need firm handling "then and there". Daniel spoke up publicly and loudly about the wrongful conviction of Susannah (Daniel 13:46). He did not wait until she had been wrongfully executed and then mutter "well I had my doubts". He spoke to avoid a greater sin being committed by her executioners; who were delighted to have been helped to avoid committing a terrible wrong.

When- Now, Later or Never?

Have circumstances changed since the law was made? Will this problem recur, or is it a one off and its easiest to let it go for now? There is a time for everything. Even Moses bottled out of enforcing the full implications of the Divorce laws. (Matthew 19:8) It took another 1500 years before Christ made the implications clear, and 2,000 years later we are still arguing about it!

You know you have to speak out if the application of the law is hurting someone and that hurt is likely to continue. Sometimes you need to steel yourself and say "If that happens again this is what I will do and say." Again prayerful reflection is vital and you must allow yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Do not fall into the trap of psyching yourself up to speak out and then find that when you do you have chosen the wrong occasion.

Often time and place have to be balanced. You cannot use the need for the ideal situation to allow you to "duck the issue" again and again. Pray to God for the right opportunity, then act on it.

How - With God’s help

If you have analysed the situation and the individuals involved correctly, then you should now know how. You may however, have to ask God to give you the courage to do it.

DEALING WITH REAL LIFE PROBLEMS

There are four possible states of the world:

1. You are right and the Law is right
2. You are right and the Law is wrong
3. You are wrong and the Law is right
4. You are both wrong

RIGHT

YOU

WRONG

Fight or Accept?	2	Discuss and Reconcile	1
Try and do Better	4	Obey and Learn	3

WRONG RIGHT
THE LAW

1 YOU ARE BOTH RIGHT

You have misunderstood what the law says. You thought you were being forced to do something silly and "on enquiry" found out you do not have to. This is very common. A golden rule is "If it seems silly..... it probably is". "Send three and fourpence we are going to a dance" should have been questioned even in the heat of battle. In most circumstance it is not wrong to check your understanding. If you find that the Law was not as you understood it, then it might be nice if either you or the law maker publicised the fact so that others do not get misled. Sometimes, however, you may agree that whilst it is OK in this case, it is an unusual occurrence and therefore no public statement need be made. An example of this is payments to Charity Trustees, which are allowed, but only if approved by the Charity Commissioners. Thus the true Law is "You cannot pay Trustees, unless we say you can" rather than "You cannot pay Trustees."

You may have extenuating circumstances. The law maker may need to consider if they add information or not. In one sense this helps because you now know what they think given the facts. In accountancy there are many rules about what you can and cannot do, but there are certain overriding principles - materiality and "true and fair view". If the person preparing accounts decides something is "not material" then they do not need to tell anyone. The profession has agreed that it is wise to make a note of your decision and the reasons for it.

2 YOU ARE RIGHT, THE LAW IS WRONG

You basically have three options

1. Obey and suffer in silence
2. Obey and complain loudly hoping to change the law in future
3. Disobey quietly and hope no one notices
4. Disobey publicly and accept the consequences

All four occur in Scripture:

1. Jesus was silent at his (manifestly unjust trial)
2. Jonah did go and prophesy to the people of Nineveh
3. Abraham didn't tell his wife that he was going to sacrifice Isaac, Joseph was going to "divorce Mary informally."
4. Daniel spoke up publicly and loudly about the wrongful conviction of Susannah

It is not always possible to keep disobedience quiet. Jesus spoke to the woman at the well. (John 4:17) Contact with Samaritans, let alone women, was forbidden. The Disciples saw him.

3 YOU ARE WRONG, THE LAW IS RIGHT

Sometimes there are good reasons for laws that appear silly. In Mark 12:40-45 Jesus heals a leper and warns him not to tell anyone. "Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places."

Remember that the world is quite big and we are quite small. We do not know everything. Learning is a lifelong process and we learn from our mistakes.

4 YOU ARE BOTH WRONG

Fortunately this is not that common. The obvious example was Pilate when the Pharisees brought Jesus to him. The Law said "He should be killed". Pilate didn't like that so decided to have Jesus flogged instead! He should have been set free, but I suppose you cannot help giving Pilate some marks for trying. In case where we realise the law is asking us to do something wrong, but our alternative is not much better, we need to seek guidance from God as to what we should do.

THE POWER OF PRAYER NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD (Luke 1:37)

Pope St Clement of Rome in the letter to the Corinthians wrote in AD 96 a prayer for political authorities

"Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offence the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honour, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favour with you."

That was not an ideal time to disagree with the authorities. In England under Henry VIII, St Thomas More said: "I die the King's good servant-but God's first."

USE YOUR CHARISMS

Discernment of God's will
 Prophetic Listening to God's Word in Scripture and Tradition
 Bring Healing to our broken world.

Prayerfully consider Matthew 5:43-48. This passage follows the Beatitudes (or the Be Attitudes) "blessed are the merciful... the peacemakers ...and those who hunger and thirst after justice." "You are salt and light... you are not to lose your saltiness ... or be hidden on a hill." "Leave your offering at the altar and go and be reconciled....go the extra mile".

"You have heard how it was said, 'You will love your neighbour' (Exodus 27) and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down his rain to fall on the upright and wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Pray Before for the opportunity "Lord help me to find the time the place and the words". It makes a change from the more commonly used "Lead us not into temptation."

Pray During for wisdom and guidance. Praying in tongues quietly is recommended.

Pray After in thanksgiving and as a way of continuing your request for a change of heart. Sometimes prayer is all that is needed and all that is possible and you do not have to tell the person you are praying for them (often it is better if you don't).

But

Prayer is not a surrogate for action. Jesus prayed, spoke and did ...normally in that order. St Benedict said "To work is to pray". See James 2:14-26 which finishes "As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds."

As Christians we are called to proclaim the Word welcome or unwelcome, and "insist on it in or out of season, to refute falsehood, correct error, give encouragement - but do all with patience and care to instruct." (2 Timothy 4:2) but we can do nothing without God's grace.

God has asked us to be in the world for a reason. Sometimes we are called only to pray. More often we are called to be in the world and improve it by our presence by exuding "the fragrance of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Jesus came not to be served but to serve Avoid evil in your heart, keep your motives pure.

Breaking the law is a spiritual wrong. The default is to submit in humility, Self-denial is a form of Prayer. Consider what is the objective of the law and whether you competent to judge. In Accountancy the concept of "True and Fair" overrides compliance with rules.

Complaining about unjust laws is a good thing to do. Even "Getting it off your chest" is OK, but if it is the only reason, you could perhaps just cry out to God. Leaving your hurt at the foot of the cross is a "blessed release". Praying quietly "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) has a good precedent and if God wants to use someone else to "cut them to the heart" (Peter in Acts 2:37) when they realise the error of their ways, then we must accept that God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes God prefers us to accept suffering in silence, sometimes He wants us to speak out against injustice. Prayerfully considering why we are speaking out helps to discern God's will.

Is gaining the objective (being allowed to ignore the rule, or changing the rule?) worth the risk of a broken relationship. Marriages break up with arguments over who takes out the rubbish, the implications and likely effects of speaking out need to be considered. In the parable of the Talents God says that greater things will be given to those who have shown they can cope with small things. Are you being tested?

Who are they most likely to listen to? Jesus was despised in his own country and said that was normal. (Matthew 13:57) The secular world says an expert is "anyone with a briefcase who comes from more than 50 miles away." Perhaps calling in another person may help. Who?

However it may not always be that easy: Proverbs 13:1 "A wise son pays attention when his father corrects him, but an arrogant person never admits he is wrong."

The response of the Pharisees to Jesus' challenges, was to plot to kill Him. As Stephen points out in his speech in Acts 7, that was the fate of most prophets. Reading the sevenfold indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23, it is not an unsurprising response. Sometimes you must be prepared to let people suffer the consequences of their own actions. Jesus was sorrowful when the rich young man in Mark 10:17-23 refused to leave his possessions, but he let him go.

We are best concentrating on doing what God has given us to do.

The serenity prayer (attributed to St Francis of Assisi and/or Reinhold Niebuhr) may help: **"God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."** However we must never underestimate God's power and if He can speak through a donkey (Numbers 22:30) He may choose to speak through **you** to change the world.

After all God made the Universe. He makes all the real rules..."The Law of the Lord is Perfect"