SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBEY THE LAW?

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There is a furore in the UK at the moment over the issue of discrimination against homosexuals. Basically, the government has passed a law saying that anyone who provides a service cannot discriminate against other people on the grounds of sexuality. The Catholic church has said, that if this is the case they will need to close their adoption agencies because they would refuse to allow children to be adopted by a gay couple and such a refusal would be against the law. Story here.

Leaving aside the specifics of the issue under discussion, the question which interests me is the one of whether there should be a clause in the new law which exempts the church from following it. My understanding of the Scriptures is that in a fallen world we should not expect governments and secular powers to support the Kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus warned us that we would be hauled before the rulers and authorities (Luke 12:11). We are led to expect that laws will be passed which Christians can't obey and in those cases we should expect to obey God, rather than man (Acts 4:19).

In our society we have the right to vote for the government we'd like, to protest before laws are passed and even afterwards - and we should use these rights. We should also pray for our rulers! However, I don't think we have a right to expect non-Christian governments to always legislate in a way that is in agreement with a Christian conscience and when the law is in conflict with the Gospel, our responsibility is clear. A Christian magistrate in Sheffield has resigned over a similar issue.

I'm not sure what I think about the gay adoption issue - it isn't as black and white as some would have us believe (see discussion here) but I do believe that the next few years will see a process which brings a christian conscience more and more into conflict with the law. Christians have been in a privileged position in the UK for many years, but for most of the history of the Church, believers have been sidelined or even persecuted by governments. It seems to me that life for the church in the UK is going to start looking much more like life for the rest of the church.

What does our mission to the wider world look like when we are on the sidelines of society?