

May 26, 2013
 erasmuse@indiana.edu

Should the “Christian flag” be flown below the U.S. flag on the pole in front of a Christian school?



Often the first concern of people who need to make this decision is this: *Isn't it a federal law that the the U.S. flag must be flown above any other flag?* The Flag Code says

“No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America.” 4 USC 7(c),

<http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/04C1.txt>

Yes, it is a federal law, but it is an unconstitutional law, and one with no enforcement provisions. You cannot be punished for violating it. (For private citizens, the Flag Code serves as a guide to be followed on a purely voluntary basis to insure proper respect for the flag, <http://www.ushistory.org/betsy/faq.htm>.) Any misguided local authority that harassed a school would lose in a Section 1983 civil rights lawsuit, with the school's legal fees reimbursed by the government.

Whether we would be violating a law or not really shouldn't matter, though. Even if we had to go to prison for putting Christ above country, we should do it. This is exactly what happened in the Roman empire. Christians would not worship the Emperor. Nobody really believed the Emperor was a god. Rather, worshipping him was a test of loyalty to the Empire. Subjects were free to worship their own gods too, but they had to pass the loyalty test by paying respect to Rome's gods. The Romans called Christians “atheists” because Christians did not believe in other people's gods, only their own.

“God also hath highly exalted him, and given him **a name which is above every name**: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” (*Philippians 2: 9-10*)

There's no way around it. The whole thrust of the Flag Code is that the United States flag is to have the place of honor above anything else in the earth. When a flag flies lower, that is a sign of subordination. The state flag is lower because loyalty to the USA trumps loyalty to Indiana. If Indiana and the USA command different things, you are to obey the USA. Similarly, flying the Christian flag lower says that if Christ and the USA command different things, you are to obey the USA.

But aren't we to obey and honor government authorities? Many passages talk about that.

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. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. **Honour all men.** Love the brotherhood. Fear God. **Honor the king. (I Peter 2)**

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. **For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.** Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? **do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid;** for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; **honour to whom honour. (Romans 13)**

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made **for** all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. **(I Timothy 2:1-3)**

We are to obey laws when they are for the common good, and respect the government that enforces them. Even if that government is evil in other ways, it does not excuse our stealing, murdering, or cheating for our own material benefit. None of the passages cited earlier says that we must obey the government if what it commands is not good.

I Peter 2 says Christians should behave honestly with unbelievers and submit to government authority because it enforces natural law. Authorities are “sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” You don't have to obey the commands of the authority when its punishments are for people who haven't done any wrong and its commendations are for people who haven't done right. *I Peter 2:17* says “Honour the king.” The start of the verse, however, is “Honor all men.” The point is that even a pagan king should be honored.

Romans 13:1 says, “The powers that be are ordained of God” and “he who resists that power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation”. But goes on to say, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.” What deserves damnation is evil works. Even under the Nazi's and the Communists, burglary and murder were crimes. If you steal and kill it is no excuse that the ruler is not Christian.

I Timothy 2:1-4 says to pray “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” That is because kings serve not only to keep we Christians from succumbing to the temptations of crime, but also to protect us from criminals and foreign marauders. In no way does *I Timothy* say that we must respect the government more than God.

But isn't this just symbolism? Does it really matter? Symbols do matter. They show loyalty. It is antinomian to say that Christians may break all the Bible's laws if only they love God in their hearts. The Christian may not say, “I honor the U.S. Constitution more than God.” Where the Christian flag represents loyalty to God, he may not spit on the flag, burn it, or trample it, even though it is just a piece of cloth.

A Florida professor told his students to write “Jesus” on a piece of paper and stomp on

it. Try a thought experiment. In your mind, write down on three pieces of paper, “President Obama”, “Governor Pence,” and “Jesus Christ”. Write “(1)” on the Obama paper and tape it high on a wall. Write “(2)” on the Pence paper and tape it a little below the Obama paper. Write “(3)” on the Jesus paper and tape it near the floor, way below the Pence paper. Finally, post a fourth piece of paper at the bottom with your signature. Does your gut tell you that all this would mean nothing?

The professor said that the purpose of the Jesus-stomping exercise was to show students how powerful symbols are, not to demean their beliefs. Really, it was the students who demeaned their beliefs. They could have refused, but they didn't, because they valued the teacher's opinion more than God's. They obeyed the secular authority and thought that if everybody else in the class was doing it, it must be okay.

But does it matter if nobody even notices that the Christian flag is lower? It doesn't feel wrong to put the U.S. flag highest. Look at the photos below from a bar in Reno and a Californian high school.



Don't they bother you, despite just being symbolic? Americans are brought up to have feelings ranging from irritation to fury when the U.S. Flag is dishonored. We are not brought up to feel emotion when God is dishonored.

“At a church I recently spoke at, the flagpole in front of the church had both flags flying, with the American flag on top. Problem, at least in terms of what the symbols are saying. Flag etiquette is clear that this is proper, but for Christians, it is symbolically blasphemous.”

<http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/what-about-the-flag-in-the-sanctuary-or-how-to-get-fired-really-fast>

We are used to putting government above God. We are so used to it that we don't even realize it. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (**Jeremiah 17:9**), and “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts” (**Proverbs 21:2**). We are careful about obeying the government. We are worse at obeying God.

“For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” (**Matthew 13:15**)

Our hearts are calloused. Your heart telling you something is not sinful is unreliable. It is particularly unreliable when the sin is something non-Christians consider harmless.

But wouldn't it look weird if our school were to deviate from normal practice, like some

kind of cult? It certainly would look weird. Looking weird is not a sin, though. Sometimes *not* looking weird is a sin.

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. **(Mark 8:38)**

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels. **(Luke 9:26)**

Putting Christ above Country will hurt more than just looking weird. Some people will say you are unpatriotic, part of an extremist cult that seeks to overthrow the U.S. Constitution. We should rejoice in that. It is why the Roman Empire persecuted Christians. If you were not persecuted by the Romans for being strange and unpatriotic, you were not a Christian.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. **(Matthew 5:11-12)**

We will not be thrown to wild beasts or fired from our government jobs. But we might wilt under the public disapproval to which we will be subject for behaving as Christians. Don't. Don't let the cock crow for the third time.

So what can be done instead of putting the U.S. flag highest or on the position of honor on the right?

A. Fly the Christian flag above the U.S. and state flags on the flagpole.

This would be noticed, and would be a tremendous testimony to the school's belief that God is greater than man. It would arouse criticism from the community, and maybe cause parents to withdraw, but that just shows how strong a witness it would be to God's glory.

B. Don't fly the Christian flag at all.

This would comport with separation of the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Man. Also, the Christian flag is hokey, and looks like a cheap imitation of the idolatry of the U.S. flag.

D. Don't fly the U.S. flag at all.

This too comports with the separation of the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Man. It is untraditional, though, and eliminates something that helps teach patriotism--- a good thing--- to the students.

C. Put the Christian flag on the wall at the entrance of the school, not on a flagpole.

This would have the symbolism of the student leaving the kingdom of Man and entering the Kingdom of God.