

## **WCF Ch. 23: Of The Civil Magistrate**

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of the whole world, has ordained civil authorities to be over people under him for his own glory and the public good. For this purpose he has armed civil authorities with the power of the sword to defend and encourage those who are good and to punish wrongdoers.<sup>1</sup>

1. Rom 13.1-4, 1 Pt 2.13-14

2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute offices of civil authority when that is their calling.<sup>2</sup> In the administration of such offices they should take care to support true religion, justice, and peace, according to the beneficial laws of each government,<sup>3</sup> and in so doing they may lawfully under the New Testament wage war on just and necessary occasions.<sup>4</sup>

2. Prv 8.15-16, Rom 13.1-4; see citations under Section 1 above.

3. Ps 2.10-12, 1 Tm 2.2, Ps 82.3-4, 2 Sm 23.3, 1 Pt 2.13, Ps 101; see citations under Section 1 above. 4. Lk 3.14, Rom 13.1-4, Mt 8.9-10, Acts 10.1-2, Rv 17.14,16.

3. Civil authorities may not take on themselves the ministering of God's word and the sacraments, the administration of spiritual power, or any interference with matters of faith.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless it is the duty of civil authorities to protect the church of our Lord, without giving preference to any denomination of Christians, so that every person with church affiliations or duties will be able to function with complete and unquestioned freedom. Since Jesus Christ has directed the establishment of regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any civil government should interfere with, abridge, or hinder the proper exercise of church government among the voluntary members of Christian denominations, acting in accordance with their own professed beliefs. It is the duty of civil authorities to protect the person and good name of everyone so that none are abused, injured, or insulted on account of religious faith or lack of it.<sup>6</sup> It is also their duty to see to it that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies are held without disturbance.<sup>7</sup>

5. 2 Chr 26.18, Mt 18.17, 16.19, 1 Cor 12.28-29, Eph 4.11-12, 1 Cor 4.1-2, Rom 10.15, Heb 5.4, Jn 18.36, Acts 5.29. 6. Is 49.23, Ps 122.9, Ezr 7.23-28, Lv 24.16, Dt 13.5-6,12, 2 Kgs 18.4, 1 Chr 13.1-9, 2 Kgs 23.1-26, 2 Chr 34.33, 15.12-13, Rom 13.1-6, Ps 105.15, Acts 18.14-16. 7. 2 Chr 19.8-11, 29 and 30, Mt 2.4-5, 2 Sm 23.3, Rom 13.4

4. It is people's duty to pray for those in authority,<sup>8</sup> to honor them,<sup>9</sup> to pay them taxes and whatever is owed them,<sup>10</sup> to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to them for conscience's sake.<sup>11</sup> Unbelief or different religious views on the part of civil authorities does not mean that they are to be disobeyed by believers, including clergymen,<sup>12</sup> in the legitimate pursuit of their duties.<sup>13</sup> The Pope, of course, has no power or jurisdiction over civil authorities or the people under them in secular affairs. The Pope never has any right to usurp secular authority, particularly capital punishment in cases of what is judged to be heresy or any other fault.<sup>14</sup>

8. 1 Tm 2.1-3. 9. 1 Pt 2.17. 10. Rom 13.6-7, Mt 22.21. 11. Rom 13.5, Ti 3.1. 12. Rom 13.1, 1 Kgs 2.35, Acts 25.9-11, 2 Pt 2.1, 10-11, Jude 8-11. 13. 1 Pt 2.13-14, 16; this is an inference from the duties just stated. 14. 2 Thes 2.4, Rv 13.15-17, 2 Tm 2.24, 1 Pt 5.3; this is an inference from the doctrine of the civil magistrate, and from duties incumbent on believers with respect to him.

Questions:

1. What is the twofold purpose for civil magistrates? Why is this important to keep in mind?
2. How does Scripture instruct us to pray for magistrates?
3. Does the civil government have the duty to promote the church? Or do they have any duty to the church whatsoever?
4. Does the civil government have the authority to rule the church or practice as pastors or dictate the theology of the church?
5. What is the duty of the church towards the government? Cite scripture and discuss with your family.
6. What does the confession warn against by the phrase, 'for conscience sake.' (Rom. 13:5, Titus 3:1) Is there a particular duty that you need to pay attention to? What helps in carrying out these duties?
7. How can you give thanks for the civil magistrates, even if you disagree with them or when it is hard?