

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 258

CHURCH & STATE

*The powers that be are
ordained of God.*

Romans 13:1

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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258

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OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

GOD, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him, over the people for His own glory and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for defense and encouragement of them that do good and for the punishment of evil doers.¹

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace,² according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and commonwealth: so, for that end they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.³

Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience's sake;⁴ and we ought to make supplications and prayers for kings and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.⁵

From The 1677/89 London Baptist Confession of Faith,
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



The Scriptures represent the Lord Jesus under a great variety of characters, which, though insufficient fully to represent Him, yet in conjunction assist us to form such exalted ideas of this great personage as mortals can reach. He is a surety that undertook and paid the dreadful debt of obedience and suffering, which sinners owed to the divine justice and law. He is a priest, a great high priest, that once offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin and now dwells in His native heaven at His Father's right hand, as the advocate and intercessor of His people. He is a prophet, Who teaches His church in all ages by His Word and Spirit. He is the supreme and universal Judge, to Whom men and angels are accountable; and His name is Jesus, a savior, because He saves His people from their sins. Under these august and endearing characters, He is often represented. But there is one character under which He is uniformly represented, both in the Old and New Testament, and that is that of a king, a great king, invested with universal authority.—*Samuel Davies*

¹ Romans 13:1-4

² 2 Samuel 23:3; Psalm 82:3-4

³ Luke 3:14

⁴ Romans 13:5-7; 1 Peter 2:17

⁵ 1 Timothy 2:1-2

MAGISTRATE AND CHURCH

Jean-Marc Berthoud

THE institutional power of God manifests itself in two ways on earth: through the physical sword of the magistrate, the instrument of the state, and through the spiritual sword of the Word of God, wielded by the church of God.

Both come from God. The centurion in Matthew 8 said to Jesus, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Mat 8:8-9).

We see here that there are two aspects to God’s working among men: one quite human and the other divine. If, as the centurion tells us, his temporal earthly power comes from God—for indeed all power comes from God—and if it is through this divinely-ordained power that he is obeyed by his subordinates, then Jesus, possessing a divine power, will be all the more obeyed by His own spiritual servants, the angels, since He is God made man. Jesus therefore does not need to act directly Himself. He can simply issue orders to His angels, who will work wherever the Lord sends them.

Let us look at another example. To Pilate, Jesus declared that He was a King. But He added that His kingdom was not of this world, saying: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (Joh 18:36).

Jesus has the heavenly army under His command, with whom He will judge the living and the dead. This will be the full and complete manifestation of His reign. When Peter, at the time of Jesus’ arrest, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Jesus said to him, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat 26:53).

It was indeed this power of Jesus Christ over His heavenly servants that the centurion understood so well. He himself had soldiers under his command, which implies that he did not need to do a thing himself to make it happen; all he had to do was give an order to a soldier or servant. He could clearly see that Jesus, though on a different plane,

was in a similar situation and therefore possessed a power similar to his own over His own spiritual servants. He had no need to personally move to heal the centurion's servant, for He too could give an order to an angel—utter a word—and the thing would be done. It is because of this most remarkable spiritual insight that Jesus affirms that He had never found such great faith in anyone in Israel (Mat 8:10). T. Robert Ingram explains Jesus' astonished exclamation as follows: "The marvel of the soldier's insight was that he saw not only the nature of authority as resting in the spoken word, but also that he understood the seat of authority in this world was divided. His own power was that of a soldier, and the obedience [to] his word of command was connected with his power to kill. But he saw the same capacity to command in Jesus and recognized it as lying above and beyond his own as an army officer: Jesus, he saw, has power even over sin, sickness, and death. Yet the power of the soldier reflected the same authority with which Jesus had preached from the mountain; for, he said, I also am a man under authority. But while he could command soldiers, he could not command the forces of life. He appealed to Jesus' non-military power as superior to his own and independent of it, yet possessing the same ultimate nature. Truly his faith and insight were marvelous."¹

These two powers have different roles that must not be confounded. The Jews of Jesus' day never ceased to confuse these two powers. This is also often seen in His disciples who were so slow to understand the meaning and scope of the good news of the kingdom of God. This is visible in the incident we just mentioned where Peter drew his sword to defend his Master. Jesus, after healing the high priest's servant whose ear Peter cut off, said to him: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mat 26:52).

This is not a denial of the power of the sword. The magistrate has received from God the right, in certain cases defined by the Law, to take the life of evildoers. Jesus rebukes Peter to show that he does not possess the authority of justice. It is not for the church to exercise the power of life and death that God has entrusted to the magistrate. This statement holds true even when this power or authority is that of the beast. At all times, Christians are exhorted to exercise the patience and faith of the saints, not accepting any compromise with the misguided state (being led "into captivity") yet also not seeking to overthrow this iniquitous power through revolution ("killing with the sword"). "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with

¹ T. R. Ingram, *The Two Powers* (Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press, 1959), 4-5.

the sword must be killed with the sword” (Rev 13:10).

What these texts condemn is not the temporal power’s lawful use of the sword intended by God—which includes the death penalty—but the carnal revolutionary and seditious² struggle of God’s children who abandon their own spiritual jurisdiction³ to usurp the exercise of temporal power.

We can characterize the difference between the spiritual power of the church and the temporal power of the state as follows:

The church (in this world) manifests the ministry of grace, the ministry of God’s mercy. Through her working throughout history, she reveals the time of God’s patience and longsuffering (Rom 2:4). For Christ at His incarnation did not come to judge the world. God does not desire the death of the sinner but his repentance, that he might have eternal life and escape the Judgment (Joh 5:24). “The Lord is...longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2Pe 3:9).

God’s judgment and vengeance do not belong to the church at present. It is only when the Lord returns in glory that the saints will also be clothed—in Christ—with this power (Mat 19:28; Rom 16:20).

But the function of *the magistrate* is wholly different. His power also comes from God, but it is a temporal power. Civil power exercises the power of the sword to restrain evil. The ministry of the sword is a foreshadowing of the last judgment.

The disciples had a difficult time understanding that Christ had come as a servant; that the greatness of the citizen of the kingdom was measured on an absolutely different scale than that of the subjects of the ruler of this world; that in the kingdom of God he who wishes to be greatest must make himself the lowliest; that in order to rule with Christ we must, just like Christ, be the servant of all. And, finally, that it is by faithfulness to God’s least commandments that true greatness in the kingdom is measured: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:19).

The disciples’ difficulty of understanding the true greatness of the kingdom of God is remarkably illustrated in Luke 22:24-26: “And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise

² **seditious** – guilty of engaging in or provoking rebellion against the authority of the state.

³ **jurisdiction** – territory or aspect of life within which power can be exercised.

lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.”

Not for a single moment did Jesus challenge the civil power, “the kings of the Gentiles,” or their right to “exercise lordship over” the people under their authority or to exercise the harsh power of the sword over them. On the contrary, He says that those who do so—that is, those who govern as masters or rulers—are called “benefactors”⁴ by their subjects because, by the fact that they govern (even if their authority is a harsh and ruthless power), they always restrain the utterly destructive forces of social anarchy.

But Christ tells His disciples that power in the church must not be exercised in this way, for the church’s power is the visible manifestation of the authority that Christ as a Husband exercises over His church through the working of the Holy Spirit. It is this spirit of goodness (not the harsh sword of the magistrate) that, according to the Word of God, must reign in the church of God. It is through this power of God, acting through the weakness of the man crucified in Christ, that the church of the living God must be governed.

From *Authority in the Christian Life* (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2020), 50-52; www.psalms78ministries.com.

Jean-Marc Berthoud: Swiss Reformed Baptist author and editor; born in 1939 in South Africa.



This power of the church differs from the power of the civil magistrate in four things. First, the power of the church is ordered only by the Word, but civil power by other civil laws also. Secondly, the former corrects only by voice in admonition, suspension, and excommunication; the latter, by real and bodily punishments. Thirdly, all spiritual correction, as excommunication itself, stands at the repentance of a sinner and proceeds no further. But the punishments of civil power stay not at repentance but proceed on even to the death of the malefactor (notwithstanding his repentance), if he be a man of death. Fourthly, in the civil power be three degrees of proceeding: first, the knowledge of the cause; secondly, the giving of the sentence; thirdly, the execution of the punishment.

In ecclesiastical are the two former, but the last belongs to God alone.—*William Perkins*

⁴ **benefactors** – honorary title, which means “persons who help other people or institutions (especially with financial help).”

POWERS ORDAINED BY GOD

John Calvin (1509-1564)

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.—Romans 13:1

WITH regard to the office of magistrates, the Lord has not only declared that He approves and is pleased with it, but He has also strongly recommended it to us by the very honorable titles He has conferred upon it. To mention a few:

When those who bear the office of magistrate are called gods, let no one suppose that there is little weight in that title. By this, we are shown that they have a commission from God, that they are invested with divine authority, and, in fact, that they represent the person of God, whose representatives they are. This is not a quibble¹ of mine but is the interpretation of Christ. “If Scripture,” says He, “called them gods, to whom the word of God came” (*see* Joh 10:35); what does this mean but that the business was committed to them by God? He appointed them to serve Him in their office, and (as Moses and Jehoshaphat said to the judges whom they were appointing over each of the cities of Judah) to exercise judgment, not for man, but for God.

Wisdom affirms the same thing by the mouth of Solomon, saying, “By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (Pro 3:15-16). For this is the same as if it were said that human perversity is not the reason why supreme power on earth is lodged in kings and other governors, but it is because of divine providence and the holy decree of Him to Whom it has seemed good so to govern the affairs of men, since He is present and also presides in enacting laws and exercising judicial equity.

Paul also plainly teaches this when he lists offices of ruling among the gifts of God which, distributed variously according to the measure of grace, ought to be employed by the servants of Christ for the edification of the church (Rom 12:8). In that place, however, he is properly speaking of the council of sober men who were appointed in the early church to take charge of public discipline. In the epistle to the Corinthians, this office is called “governments” (1Co 12:28). Still, as we see that civil power has the same end in view, there can be no doubt that

¹ **quibble** – slight or criticism about an unimportant matter.

he is recommending every kind of just government.

Paul speaks much more clearly when he comes to a detailed discussion of the subject. For he says that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Thus, rulers are the ministers of God, “not a terror to good works, but to the evil” (Rom 13:1-3).

To this we may add the examples of saints, some of whom held the offices of kings, as David, Josiah, and Hezekiah; others of governors, as Joseph and Daniel; others of civil magistrates among a free people, as Moses, Joshua, and the judges. The Lord expressly approved their functions. Therefore, no man can doubt that civil authority is, in the sight of God, not only sacred and lawful, but the most sacred, and by far the most honorable, of all stations in mortal life.

Those who desire to introduce anarchy would object that, though in former times kings and judges ruled over ignorant and unlearned people, yet that, in the present day, this servile mode of governing does not at all agree with the perfection which Christ brought with His gospel. By this they betray not only their ignorance but also their devilish pride, for they arrogantly ascribe to themselves a perfection of which not even a hundredth part is seen in them.

But be that as it may, it is easy to refute them. For, when David says, “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth,” and “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry,” he does not order these rulers to lay aside their authority and return to private life (Psa 2:10-12). Instead, he commands them to subject the power they hold to Christ, that He may rule over all.

In the same way, when Isaiah predicts of the church, “Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers” (Isa 49:23), he does not tell them to abdicate their authority. Instead, he gives them the honorable titles of patrons of the pious worshippers of God, for this prophecy refers to the coming of Christ. I intentionally omit many passages which occur throughout Scripture (and especially in the Psalms) in which the due authority of all rulers is asserted. The most well-known passage of all is that in which Paul, when admonishing Timothy that prayers should be offered up in the public assembly for kings, adds the reason: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1Ti 2:2). In these words, he commends the condition of the church to the protection and guardianship of the civil government.

This consideration ought to be constantly present in the minds of magistrates, for it will help to create a strong incentive to the discharge of their duty. It will also give them extraordinary consolation by

smoothing the difficulties of their office, which are certainly numerous and weighty. What zeal for integrity, prudence, meekness, self-control, and innocence ought to sway those who know that they have been appointed ministers of divine justice! How will they dare to allow iniquity to enter their courts of justice when they are told that this is the throne of the living God? How will they dare to pronounce an unjust sentence with their mouth when they understand that it is an ordained organ of divine truth? How could they in good conscience sign ungodly decrees with a hand that they know has been appointed to write the acts of God?

In short, if they remember that they are the representatives of God, they must watch with all care, diligence, and industry, so that they may exhibit in themselves a kind of image of divine providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice. And let them constantly keep this additional thought in view, that if a curse is pronounced on him who “doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully,” a much heavier curse will fall on him who deals deceitfully in a righteous calling.

Therefore, when Moses and Jehoshaphat urged their judges to the discharge of their duty, they had nothing by which they could more powerfully stimulate their minds than the consideration of which we have already referred, “Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (2Ch 19:6-7 *cf.* Deu 1:16-18).

And in another passage it is said, “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods” (Psa 82:1; Isa 3:14). This is written to spur them on to their duty, for they hear that they are ambassadors of God, to Whom they must one day render an account of the authority committed to them. This admonition certainly ought to have the greatest effect upon them. For, if they sin in any way at all, not only is injury done to the men whom they wickedly sin against, but they also insult God Himself, Whose sacred tribunals they defile.

On the other hand, they have an admirable source of comfort when they reflect that they are not engaged in a profane calling unworthy of a servant of God, but are instead in a most sacred office, for they are the ambassadors of God.

Some refuse to be persuaded by all these passages of Scripture. They speak against this sacred ministry as if it were something abhorrent to religion and Christian godliness. But when they do this, are not they attacking God Himself, Who is most certainly insulted when His

servants are disgraced? These men not only speak evil of dignities, but they do not even want God to reign over them (1Sa 7:7). For, if this was truly said of the people of Israel when they refused the authority of Samuel, how can it be less truly said in the present day of those who allow themselves to break loose against all the authority established by God?

But they will declare that when our Lord said to His disciples, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve,” He in this way prohibited all Christians from becoming kings or governors (Luk 22:25-26). Such sly interpreters they are! A dispute had arisen among the disciples as to which of them would be greatest. To suppress this vain ambition, our Lord taught them that their ministry was not like the power and authority of earthly rulers, among whom one greatly surpasses another. I ask you, how can this be used to disparage royal authority? To the contrary, what does it prove at all except that the office of civil government is different from the apostolic ministry?

Besides, though different forms exist in civil offices, yet there is no difference in the fact that they must all be received by us as ordinances of God. For Paul includes all together when he says that “there is no power but of God,” and even the least pleasing of all was honored with the highest testimonial—I mean the power of one. When a single person rules, everyone else is in subjection to that person. This form of government was formerly disliked by heroic and more excellent natures, but Scripture expressly affirms that even this is given by divine wisdom. It is by God’s wisdom that “kings reign” (Pro 8:15). We are also specifically commanded “to honour the king” (1Pe 2:17).

From *God and the Civil Government* (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2020), 43-48; www.psalms78ministries.com.

John Calvin (1509-1564): French theologian, pastor, and important leader during the Protestant Reformation; born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



What then if the Lord grants us princes who either through apparent cruelty or through crass ignorance combat the reign of Christ? First of all, the church should take refuge in prayers and tears and correct its life. For these are the arms of the faithful for overcoming the rages of the world.—*Theodore Beza*

HOW SHOULD MAN BE GOVERNED?

Pierre Viret (1511-1571)

THE Law of God alone is the true standard by which all good and just government must be ruled and conformed...I will take a little time to discuss the grave difficulties that are always found in any attempt to govern men well, and the difficulties encountered in seeking to restrain them within the limits of reason, right, and justice, as well as the reasons for these difficulties. I do this to display the only true means to remedy these grave evils and to achieve the true union in God, which is required in human society. Without that, men can never exist except in the state that they most fear, that is, in misery and unhappiness in both this world and the next. For, if this is well known, it can be greatly serviceable to all in order that all people might hold the Law of God in such value and such esteem as it ought to be held.

Now, to begin, it is fitting first to know that there has from time immemorial been a great and very heated debate among wise men regarding the various forms of principalities and governments that have existed from the beginning in the civil sphere. None have yet been able to give a certain or sure solution to this problem or one that is agreeable to all because of the great difficulties found in all parts. Those who have debated this matter have included all sorts of civil governments and public administrations under three types, which they have named after Greek words, calling the first *monarchy*, the second *aristocracy*, and the third *democracy*.

The first means a form of government and principality in which a single man is the universal head of all those over whom he has charge. This man possesses lordship and sovereign power over all, just as the name *monarchy* implies. All kingdoms that have a sovereign king who rules over all men adhere to this form of government.

The second means a principality and a government in which the sovereign rule is not given to a single man (as it is to a king in his kingdom), nor is it bestowed on all the people in general (as it is in a community), but to particular persons and to a fairly large number of those who are considered the wisest, most excellent, and most fitting to execute this charge, as the name *aristocracy* implies.

The third means a principality and a government in which the sovereign power is not entrusted to any single man or even to a certain

number of noble persons (as in the two preceding), but is left to all the community in general, who elect by common election those to whom they wish to give the government, though they do this with such a condition that the sovereign power remains in themselves.

If we desired to mix these three forms together, many other varieties could be drawn forth, though they could always be reduced to these three. There would only be a difference in the fact that we did not take one of these three simply and purely but instead used many pieces of several of them, retaining more or less of either one or the other.

Now there is indeed much matter here to consider before we determine which of these three is the best, most excellent, most secure, and most suitable for the preservation of the nation and human society, and which is the one most to be desired. For, according to how we judge each one, we could then more easily judge which pieces should be mixed of the two or three of them.

Some prefer the first to all the others, particularly those who seek to flatter emperors, kings, and other similar monarchs. These first quote the example of God as the most perfect that could exist, saying that, just as He is only one God, King, and sovereign Ruler over all creatures, so it is also required that there be a particular head among men to whom all the others are subject...

The other reason these people set forth is that this state of monarchy is not as subject to changes and to factions,¹ intrigues,² seditions,³ and rebellions as the other two are (and particularly *democracy*). These things are very difficult to avoid where there is a multitude of rulers, considering the vast dissensions and contrary opinions that exist among the various passions and desires of men who are so violent and truly difficult to restrain within the limits of reason. Therefore, it seems to these people that a ruler who has sovereign power over all can order all his subjects under his obedience much more easily than any other and can much more easily overcome factions, revolutions, and rebellion, which are true scourges in the common society of mankind. Indeed, of anything that could happen, these are the most to be feared.

These same reasons are why even those who prefer the monarchy to the other two options also consider aristocracy to be the best after this first one because it is not as subject to seditions and rebellions because the government is not in as many hands as it is in the popular state,

¹ **factions** – groups of people forming a minority within a larger group, especially in politics.

² **intrigues** – underhanded plotting and scheming.

³ **seditions** – conduct or speech that stir up people to rebel against the authority of a state.

where many times each one tries to be master and in which the most rebellious, the most revolutionary, the most audacious⁴ and the greatest rabble-rousers⁵ take the prize.

Thus, those also who in no way approve of monarchy because it is so difficult for it to remain long without being transformed into tyranny⁶ (as the examples of the ancient histories sufficiently testify), these, I say, choose this second type as the most secure and the best of all and as the most suitable way to take the happy medium that must be taken in a principality and commonwealth, in order that it fall neither to the one side nor to the other, nor approach either of these two extremes that I mentioned—that is, tyranny on the one side and revolution on the other.

Also, seeing that great intrigues and factions often exist in this second state and that it often happens that some are made so great and are more elevated to such high authority that they subjugate their companions, there are many who therefore prefer the popular state, which is the third option we call *democracy*. Their reason is that there is less danger of tyranny where there is a greater multitude in which the sovereign power resides. For some cannot dominate over the others; and particularly the lower classes are not in as great a danger of being oppressed by the rich than in the second state in which only the most prominent possess the sovereign power...

What then can we conclude of all these varieties of opinions, so contrary to each other and yet all possessing very reasonable arguments? When all is well considered and mulled⁷ over, we can come to no other conclusion but that men can never be more miserable and more poorly governed than when they are governed by their fellowmen—that is, by governors who are mortal men as they are, no matter what form of government they may employ.

For, if a single man is the head and possesses the supreme authority, either he will be sensible or foolish, wise or stupid, virtuous or wicked. If he is foolish, stupid, and wicked, how great a danger is there when all the people and the whole country depend on such an insane head? For this would be the same as if the government of men were given over to a wild beast; or as if an insane person were put in charge of madmen...

⁴ **audacious** – shamelessly disrespectful.

⁵ **rabble-rousers** – persons who speak with intention of inflaming the emotions of a crowd of people, typically for political reasons.

⁶ **tyranny** –rule by one with absolute power without legal right; cruel and oppressive rule.

⁷ **mulled** – thought about deeply and at length.

If the ruler is a wise and virtuous man and one who fears God, very grave dangers still exist. The first is that when his reign has reached its end he may be followed by another who will be utterly contrary to him and who will destroy everything by his tyranny. For, first, he is not immortal like God is; to the contrary, he will most certainly die just like other men. Indeed, it happens often that good rulers remain the shortest time in this world; for God more quickly takes them away than others, both because the world is not worthy of them and because God wills by this means to punish men for their sins...

The other danger is that, even though the ruler is the greatest and most righteous of men and the wisest that could ever be found among others, and even though he enjoys a long life, yet it will still be very difficult for him to keep himself from being deceived by his counselors and others who are around him, and even those he considers his dearest friends in whom he places the most trust. For, if he is prudent, wise, and virtuous, he will not govern without counsel. If his counsel is not good and trustworthy, how will he guard himself against it—no matter how clever, wise, and experienced he might be—without being often deceived? For it is not only difficult but nearly impossible for one man alone to always guard himself against so many snares... If the counsel of the ruler is evil and full of flatterers, ambitious, avaricious,⁸ thieves, debauchers, and tyrants (which is standard for courts), the ruler will not govern, but those to whom the ruler and his name serve as a mask will govern in his name. They will establish *their* reign and tyranny, using the ruler in the same way that a decoy serves hunters in their hunting and as idols serve the priests to emphasize themselves and to bring themselves greater advantages by their use...

As for *democracy*, we have already mentioned the dangers found there. Although it is easier to prevent tyranny here where many people possess authority than where it is possessed by a single man or a very small number, yet it seldom happens that the majority are the best and the most upright and that they overcome the worst, but the complete contrary. And if it happens that the multitude of those who are in authority is greater, so also the dangers are more fearful accordingly, and the conspiracies are much greater and the troubles more dangerous!

And, among other dangers in a democracy, there are customarily two great evils that bring great miseries and that often ruin nations. The first is *the elections of the magistrates*. The second is *the judgments and executions of the matters ordained by the laws*. For, where elections

⁸ **avaricious** – greedy.

devolve upon⁹ the community, it is very difficult to elect governors and magistrates such as are required; and this is the case primarily for two reasons. The first is a desire that every person has of living in his own carnal liberty and fleshly pleasure without being subject to any laws. This desire is the reason that those who vote in the elections prefer to have governors and magistrates elected *according to their own mold* (and who are devoted to them and under whom they can live in greater license without rebuke or correction) rather than having rulers who fear God, who respect the law, and who punish wrongdoers according to every person's deeds.

The other reason is the ambition and greed that are the reasons why many use intrigue to win the civil offices of the country either for themselves or for their friends and relatives and for those by whom they have been corrupted. And this is done not out of a desire to maintain God's honor or the public good or to administer true justice, but is done merely for the honor and worldly profit of those who hope to receive it and to reign above the others.

Seeing that such people who snatch offices and positions by such schemes and who win them by such means do not set forth as their goal the glory of God, the edification of His church, or the welfare of the general public but only their own glory and their own gain, it is not possible for them to ever fulfill their office and duty as they ought...

If man thus encounters so many hindrances within himself, which is the reason that he cannot and does not even know how to govern himself, how could he ever govern others? Therefore, Aristotle¹⁰ (even though he was a miserable pagan and ignorant of the true God) did not speak without reason when he said that whoever sets a man as governor sets up a savage beast as a government.

Now, by what has been said, we can already judge what hope we have of being able to find such men—particularly such who live any great length of time! And, even if they could be found, there is still this other evil: neither legislators nor officers who have the charge to execute what the Law commands hold the hearts of men in their hands in such a way that they could make them desire to obey. Only *God*, the sovereign Lawgiver, possesses this power. And what we said of the *civil* government must also be understood of the *familial and household* government and of *self-government* as well.

For this reason, He wished to give the Law Himself to serve as a rule

⁹ **devolve upon** – transfer to.

¹⁰ **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.) – Greek philosopher, mathematician, tutor of Alexander the Great.

to all men on earth, to rule their spirit, understanding, will, and desires, both of those who govern others as well as those who must be governed by them. And He did this in order that all together might acknowledge a single God as their sovereign Ruler and Lord (and might acknowledge His servants and ministers), to Whom they must all one day render an account before the throne of His majesty.

Now He included in this Law every moral teaching necessary for men to live rightly. And it contains even more—incomparably more—than all the philosophers in all their books, both in their ethics as well as in their politics and economics, and than all the legislators who have ever been, who are still alive, and who will yet live, in all their laws and ordinances; so much so that all together have never set forth any good thing that is not already contained in it. Nor have they ever set forth a wicked law except what is not contained in it...

For we must not dare hope that any king, ruler, or people will ever enjoy a lasting prosperity unless God reigns in all and over all, and unless they are governed by Him as clearly appears by the promises and curses that He added to His Law. For, just as He alone can give us a perfect Law according to which we ought to govern ourselves, so He can likewise give appropriate rulers, magistrates, pastors, and ministers to put that Law into effect and whom He can fashion as instruments suitable to His service. He can also give power to their offices and ministries to properly order those over whom they have charge to His obedience. For, just as He gives His Law to make us understand how we have failed and to recognize our need, so He also gives the Holy Spirit by Jesus Christ His Son, Who renews our hearts and gives the gifts and graces necessary to accomplish this Law.

If this is done, then there is neither monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, nor any form of civil government whatever, having its foundation in this Law of God, which would be unsuitable to human society and to all nations over which God shall preside.

From *When to Disobey* (Wake Forest, NC: Church & Family Life, 2020), 13-27;
www.churchandfamilylife.com/products.

Pierre Viret (1511-1571): Swiss Reformer, colleague of John Calvin, and preacher at the Cathedral of Lausanne; born in Orbe, Switzerland.



Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.—*Acts 5:29*

GOD-ORDAINED FORCE

R. C. Sproul (1939-2017)

IN the United States, we often hear the phrase *separation of church and state*, but it should be noted that this phrase does not occur in the country's founding documents. It is not found in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights. It comes from a remark made by Thomas Jefferson about the principles that he believed were implied in the founding documents of the United States. But it has now become perhaps the only remaining absolute in American culture: the absolute principle of the absolute separation of church and state.

From the very beginning of Christianity, the relationship between church and state has been a matter of great concern. When we look at the Old Testament, we see that Israel was a *theocracy*, a state that was ruled by God through anointed kings. Though the church and state had certain distinctions—including distinctions between the work of priests (the church) and the work of kings (the state)—the two institutions were so closely integrated that to speak of separation of the two would be fallacious.

However, once the New Testament community was established, the church became a missionary church, reaching out to various nations, tribes, and peoples who were ruled by secular governments. Christians had to face the question of how they were to relate to the Roman Empire, to the magistrate in Corinth, or to the local authorities wherever the church spread. For centuries, the church has had to carefully examine its role in society—especially when that society does not officially hold to a Christian worldview. To understand the relationship between church and state from a biblical perspective, we must ask some fundamental questions.

There are many different types and structures of government, but what is the essence—the fundamental principle—of government? The answer to that question is one word: *force*. Government is force—but it is not just any kind of force. It is force that is supported by an official, legal structure. Government is a structure that is endowed legally with the right to use force to compel its citizens to do certain things and not do other things.

Years ago, I had lunch with a well-known United States senator. We were discussing some of the issues involved with the Vietnam War—then being waged amid great controversy—when he said to me, “I do not believe that any government has the right to force its citizens to do what they do not want to do.” I almost choked on my soup! I said to him, “Senator, what I hear you saying is that no government has the right to govern. If you take legal force away from government, it is then reduced to simply making suggestions. But is it not true that when governments enact laws, the government functions as that which is designed to enforce whatever laws are enacted?”

Ultimately, the original form of government rests on the rule and authority of God Himself. God is the author of the universe, and with that authorship comes the authority over what He has made: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psa 24:1).

We can see a form of government in the creation account. When God created human beings, He gave them a mission: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Adam and Eve were to function as rulers in God’s stead, as His viceregents¹ over creation. God delegated to Adam and Eve dominion over the earth, so that they were to exercise authority over the animals. It was not authority over people, but it was authority over the earth and the environs² and the creatures therein, over all the lesser forms of divine creation.

God also gave Adam and Eve a prohibition: they were not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God gave an ominous warning of what would happen if they transgressed His command: “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). This means that penal sanctions would be imposed by His authority. When Adam and Eve disobeyed His rule and rebelled against His authority, they did not immediately undergo physical death, but spiritual death. Physical death was postponed until later, as God in His graciousness exercised mercy. However, one of the punishments that He imposed upon these rebellious creatures was to banish them from the Garden of Eden.

We next see a manifestation of earthly government in the angel that God placed at the entrance to the garden of Eden. The angel stood at the gateway to Eden with a flaming sword. The flaming sword functioned as an instrument of force to prevent Adam and Eve from

¹ **vice-regents** – those who act on behalf of a ruler.

² **environs** – districts surrounding a place, especially an urban area.

returning to the paradise in which they had been placed.

The next issue we should consider is the purpose of government. Early in church history, Saint Augustine³ observed that government is a necessary evil; for in this world among fallen human creatures, you will never find a morally perfect government. All governments, no matter what structure they manifest, are representative of fallen humanity because governments are made up of sinful people. We all know that human government can be corrupt. Augustine's point was this: government itself is evil, but it is a necessary evil; it is necessary because evil in our world needs to be restrained. One means of this restraint is human government. In light of this, Augustine argued that human government was not necessary before the Fall.

Thomas Aquinas⁴ disagreed with Augustine on this point. He still saw a role for government in managing the division of labor that one could imagine in a hypothetical unfallen creation. Thomas certainly agreed that the primary purpose of government was to restrain evil. To both Thomas and Augustine, the primary purpose for which government was instituted was to exercise restraint upon human evil and to preserve the very possibility of human existence. Therefore, the first task of government is to protect people from evil and to preserve and maintain human life.

Another role that government fulfills is protecting human property. Many people seek to violate other human beings by stealing, abusing, or destroying their property.

A final role for government is regulating agreements, upholding contracts, and ensuring just weights and balances. Government should seek to protect people from the injustice of fraud. The butcher who puts his thumb surreptitiously⁵ on the scale along with the meat that he is weighing has injured his customer by inflating the cost of the goods through a fraudulent practice. Government is necessary to regulate this behavior by devising just weights, measurements, and standards.

God created government to protect humanity—but not just humanity. Government is to protect the world itself as well. When Adam and Eve were placed in the magnificent garden, they were given the mandate from God to tend, till, and cultivate the garden. They knew they were not called to exploit or abuse this world. Therefore, governments,

³ **Aurelius Augustine** (A.D. 354-430) – Bishop and theologian of Hippo Regius in North Africa.

⁴ **Thomas Aquinas** (A.D. 1225-1274) – Italian philosopher, theologian, and Dominican friar.

⁵ **surreptitiously** – secretly.

as a manifestation of man's call by God to be His vice-regents, have a role in regulating how we treat God's creatures and creation—not just human beings, but also animals and the environment in which we live.

Such regulation is a good thing, but it is worth noting that even in its most benign⁶ form, government involves restrictions on people's liberty. We boast as Americans that we live in a free country, and that is true, relatively speaking; but no people in any land have ever lived in an atmosphere of complete freedom. Every law that is ever enacted by any legislative body restricts someone's freedom. If we enact a law against murder, we are placing restrictions on the criminal's right to kill a person with malice aforethought. Every single law that is passed restricts someone's freedom. Some freedoms are good to restrict—such as the freedom to murder—and others are not. Therefore, we must be exceedingly careful every time we pass a law. We need to realize what we are doing. We need to remember that we are taking freedom away from people, and the longer we do that in a careless manner, the less liberty we are left with in our lives.

Clearly, God has instituted the state, and we do have government. The question then becomes, How are we as Christians to relate to that government?

From *What Is the Relationship between Church and State?*, part of R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet series. Explore the entire series of booklets at Ligonier.org/CrucialQuestions.

Robert Charles Sproul (1939-2017): Presbyterian theologian, teaching elder; founder of Ligonier Ministries; born in Pittsburgh, PA, USA.



The question is, if subjects be bound to obey kings, in case they command that which is against the law of God: that is to say, to which of the two (God or king) must we rather obey...The Holy Scripture doth teach that God reigns by His own proper authority, and kings by derivation; God from Himself, kings from God; that God hath a jurisdiction proper, kings are His delegates. It follows then, that the jurisdiction of God hath no limits, that of kings [is] bounded; that the power of God is infinite, that of kings confined; that the kingdom of God extends itself to all places, that of kings is restrained within the confines of certain countries. In like manner, God hath created of nothing both heaven and earth...Seeing then that kings are only the lieutenants of God, established in the throne of God by the Lord

God Himself, and the people are the people of God...It follows of necessity that kings must be obeyed for God's cause, and not against God.

—*Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

⁶ **benign** – favorable.

GOD, GOVERNMENT, & AUTHORITY

H. Rondel Rumburg

ALL that has legitimacy is ordered of the Lord. Men cannot of themselves give authority to themselves, for God is sovereign. Only God speaks with infinite authority, for He is the ultimate authority as sovereign of heaven and earth. Mankind has only delegated authority. Only the Lord Jesus Christ could say, “All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:8). Since Christ possesses the ultimate authority, then the only legitimate authority is that which He delegates. True government, whatever kind it is, must be by God’s directive. Validity has its root in proper authority. All conduct or government, whether it is personal or social, finds its authority in God alone. George W. Marston explained:

“Because man is in the image of God, he has discovered in himself the principles of righteousness. Although this revelation has been marred by the Fall, man still has a general knowledge of these principles. This is evident from the similarity between the Code of Hammurabi¹ and the Ten Commandments. Even though fallen man is in a state of rebellion against God, even though he lacks the basic motives and ability to apply these principles, man has been both influenced and restrained in his conduct by them. Therefore, he is accountable to God for his conduct (Rom 1:18-2:15)...In the Bible, which is the Word of God, we have a perfect and a complete revelation of those things which God would have us believe concerning Him and those duties which He requires of us. This Book is therefore man’s touchstone in all matters of faith and practice.”²

All government, including civil government, must be ordained by God. A prime example of this truth is found in the first form of government on earth among human life. It was “family government.” The church and state could not exist unless the family provides the materials of which both are built. B. M. Palmer³ provided an expression of this when he wrote: “The Scriptures...teach that the family is a divinely constituted state in which the parents rule, not simply by natural right,

¹ **Code of Hammurabi** – law code devised by Babylonian king Hammurabi (c. 1790-1750 BC).

² George W. Marston, *The Voice of Authority* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1960), 54-55.

³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818-1902), *The Family, in Its Civil and Churchly Aspects: An Essay, in Two Parts* (Richmond; New York: Presbyterian Committee of Publication; A. D. F. Randolph & Co., 1876), 77.

but by an authority immediately delegated from God.” All genuine government, in order to be sustained, must have God’s authority behind it.

THE PROOF OF THIS ASSERTION: How do we know that God has ordained civil government? The answer: God is supreme in all things, and He rules over all. Since God is the sovereign⁴ [over] all, then any other rule must be purposed by Him and must submit to Him.

God is supreme in all things. The London Confession of 1689 (chapter 24, “Of the Civil Magistrate,” section 1) recorded: “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world has ordained civil magistrates.” This is a Baptist historic statement of the biblical truth that God is the supreme power ordaining civil government.

Romans 13:1-7 reveals God’s supreme power to ordain earthly government. This chapter says, “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” (Rom 13:1). This verse establishes the principle that state or civil government has *delegated* authority and not *absolute* authority. God, Who governs absolutely, ordains powers and authorities.

“History has shown that when theism⁵ comes to its rights, human liberty is assured, while the natural tendency of atheism is ever toward totalitarianism. However, at the time of this letter the systematic persecution of Christians by the state had not yet begun, and therefore this inference is not drawn by the apostle; but when Caesar later demanded the things that belonged to God, Christians could not doubt that he had exceeded his just claims upon their obedience.”⁶

When Paul penned Romans 13, there was no organized persecution of Christians by the civil leaders. However, when the time of persecution came, the Christians stood their ground. Their obedience was to Christ rather than Caesar. They would obey God rather than man (Act 5:29). “Romans 13:1 tells us that even these authorities have been established by God, and that we have a legitimate (though not unlimited) responsibility to obey even them.”⁷

All powers are subservient to God’s power because it is given at God’s discretion. Civil government is ordained of God the Creator Who is the moral governor of mankind; but the church is ordained of God

⁴ To affirm that God is sovereign is to affirm that God reigns universally and invincibly. God’s sovereignty implies His absolute ownership (Gen 14:22; Deu 10:14; Job 41:11; Psa 24:1), authority (Ps 47:2, 7), and control (Job 38-39; Jer 5:22; Eph 1:11) over all things.

⁵ **theism** – broadly, belief in a god. In this sense, animism, pantheism, and polytheism are all forms of theism. Christian theism is the belief in the triune God revealed in the Bible.

⁶ Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Romans* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 209.

⁷ James M. Boyce, *Two Cities, Two Loves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 180.

as the spiritual governor by carrying the redemptive message and the revealed will of God. Civil rule deals with man as a man, but the church deals with man as a sinner before God. When civil government tries to remove itself from God, it becomes a problem and threat to itself and man (Psa 2). John W. Whitehead⁸ pointed out:

“When the civil authorities divorce themselves from God and the Bible, they become self-styled lords and lawless as well. As St. Augustine of Hippo pointed out, godless civil rulers are not more than bands of robbers. Moreover, being lawless in relation to God, they are lawless and predatory⁹ in relation to men.”¹⁰

Civil power should not be seen as a mere “social contract” between men. There are those who have declared that civil power is just an agreement among men. The humanistic theory of natural law believes that societal relationships arise through a social contract that equates law with the general will of the people. The Social Contract Theory¹¹ had its origin in Roman law. In the social contract, the individual submits his judgment, rights, and abilities to the community. The power in this view does not lie in God or the ruler but in the consensus of community. The Social Contract Theory does not see the sovereign power residing in God, but views it as *in the people* who become [substitute] gods. God’s revelation in Romans 13:1 does not agree with such a position, for it declares civil power to be God’s ordination by law. Both cannot be correct. Therefore, the social contract view is the great danger presently facing Christians on this issue. For authority, in such a view, is given to *man* and not to *God*. The present state of society shows the disastrous nature of the Social Contract Theory.

John Locke,¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau,¹³ and others set forth the “social contract” position. “Statism”¹⁴ was fostered by this view and remains as a festering sore on the body politic. Man’s authority replaced God’s authority in the philosophies of these men. By this theory, man is the measure of all things. Rousseau’s “noble savage” became the

⁸ **John W. Whitehead** – founder of The Rutherford Institute, which defends civil liberties.

⁹ **predatory** – characterized by victimizing others for personal gain.

¹⁰ Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution* (Elgin, IL; David C. Cook, 1983), 150.

¹¹ **Social Contract Theory** – (in the theories of Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, and others) an agreement, entered by individuals that results in the formation of the state or of organized society. The prime motive is the desire for protection, which entails the surrender of some or all personal liberties.

¹² **John Locke (1632-1704)** – English philosopher during the Enlightenment, seen as one of the most influential thinkers during this time.

¹³ **Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)** – French philosopher and writer during the Enlightenment; his writings contributed to the French Revolution.

¹⁴ **statism** – state control of economic and social affairs.

authority.¹⁵ However, a mere consensus of depraved humanity cannot be authoritative...The “social contract” opened a Pandora’s Box toward humanism. Modern religious “individualism” was fostered by this view. Man cannot function properly when he takes an autonomous¹⁶ position. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), the grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale in her orthodox days, made a clear statement concerning John Locke’s social contract. Dwight wrote regarding the foundation of all government being the Will of God. He then addressed the departure from that belief by Mr. Locke:

“This doctrine supposes that mankind was originally without any government and that in an absolute state of nature they voluntarily came together for the purpose of constituting a body politic, creating rulers, prescribing their functions, and making laws directing their own civil duties. It supposes that they entered grave and philosophic deliberations, individually consented to be bound by the will of the majority, and cheerfully gave up the wildlife of savage liberty for restraints, which, however necessary and useful, no savage could ever brook, even for a day. Antecedently to such an assembly and its decisions, this doctrine supposes that men have no civil rights, obligations, or duties and, of course, that those who do not consent to be bound by such a compact are, now, not the subjects of either: such a compact, in the apprehension of the abettors¹⁷ of this doctrine, being that which creates all the civil rights, obligations, and duties of man.

“The absurdities of this doctrine are endless...Government, as I have already remarked, *is founded in the will of God*. The evidence of this

¹⁵ “In a number of ways, the State Rousseau planned...anticipated the one the Pol Pot regime [Pol Pot (1925-1998): Cambodian communist leader of Khmer Rouge] actually tried to create in Cambodia, and this is not entirely surprising since the Paris-educated leaders of the regime had all absorbed Rousseau’s ideas. Of course, Rousseau sincerely believed that such a State would be contented since the people would have been trained to like it. He did not use the word *brainwash*, but he wrote: ‘Those who control a people’s opinions control its actions.’ Such control is established by treating citizens, from infancy, as children of the State, trained to ‘consider themselves only in their relationship to the Body of the State’...Again, this anticipates Mussolini’s central Fascist doctrine: ‘Everything within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State.’ The educational process was thus the key to the success of the cultural engineering needed to make the State acceptable and successful; the axis of Rousseau’s ideas was the citizen as child and the State as parent, and he insisted the government should have complete charge of the upbringing of all children. Hence—and this is the true revolution Rousseau’s idea brought about—he moved the political process in the very center of human existence by making the legislator...into the new Messiah, capable of solving all human problems by creating New Men. ‘Everything,’ he wrote, ‘is at the root dependent on politics.’” (Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 25-26). One sees where modern America gets its ideas.

¹⁶ **autonomous** – self-governing, independent, and free of external influence or control.

¹⁷ **abettors** – people who encourage or help someone to do something wrong.

position is complete. It cannot be questioned that God made mankind to make them happy if they themselves will consent to be so. As little can it be questioned that government is indispensable to their happiness and to all the human means of it—to the safety of life, liberty, and property, to peace, to order, to useful knowledge, to morals, and to religion. Nay, it is necessary to the very existence of any considerable numbers of mankind. A country without government would speedily, for [lack] of those means of subsistence and comfort to the existence of which it is indispensable, become an Arabian desert; and that, however fruitful its soil or salubrious¹⁸ its climate. Mankind has never yet been able to exist for any length of time in a state of anarchy. What reason so completely evinces,¹⁹ the Scriptures decide in the most peremptory²⁰ manner. ‘The powers that be,’ says Paul, ‘are ordained of God’; in other words, government is an ordinance of God.”²¹

The result of the “social contract” view is lawlessness and anarchy. It produces a man-centered world that ends in meaninglessness.

“[T]he social contract is perfectly reconcilable with the most absolute of despotic rule and with the complete negation of constitutionalism or the rule of law. Hobbes is the classic case here, for his two alternative accounts of how society and government come simultaneously into being are designed to tie every citizen to unquestioning obedience to a supreme, irresistible, indivisible sovereign whose dictates are the law”²²...

True government serves God and the public good. Government is to be the servant, not the master! Public good is not what the public determines it to be but what God has revealed it to be. God ordained civil government. The place of civil government is under God, but representative of the people in civil matters. The purpose of civil government is the glory of God and the good of the public.

From *Baptists and the State* (Spout Spring, VA: Society for Biblical and Southern Studies, 2016), 41-49, 70.

H. Rondel Rumberg: Baptist pastor, author, and president of the Society for Biblical and Southern Studies.



¹⁸ **salubrious** – health-giving.

¹⁹ **evinces** – proves by argument.

²⁰ **peremptory** – absolute.

²¹ Timothy Dwight, *Theology*, Vol. 3, 324, 326.

²² Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, 466.

TRUE OBEDIENCE IN CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

Christopher Goodman (c. 1521-1603)

*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right
in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God,
judge ye.—Acts 4:19*

THERE is nothing to be compared to true obedience in preserving the commonwealth of towns, cities, and kingdoms or in maintaining true religion, Christian peace, and concord.¹ For by that means, every man is instructed how to render unto *God* His due honor and glory, and to *man* that which his office requires. Even so, nothing is more hateful to God, neither more harmful to man, than to be so bewitched with Satan's false illusions that they are not able to distinguish between obedience and disobedience. But as men without all judgment and natural sense, they take the one for the other, being in themselves plainly contrary. That alone is the cause of all disorder and lamentable confusion wherewith the entire world is both this day, and has been also from the beginning most miserably defaced and oppressed.

For when vile man, replenished² with pride, vainglory,³ and gross ignorance, measures obedience with the crooked line of his own corrupt judgment and not with the infallible truth of God's holy Word, he must prefer his own decrees, fantasies, and ordinances to the comfortable laws and living precepts of God his Creator. Then in place of justice, he receives injustice; for right, wrong; for virtue, vice; for law, will; for love, hatred; for truth, falsehood; for plain dealing, dissimulation;⁴ for religion, superstition; for true worship, detestable idolatry; and to be brief, for God, Satan; for Christ, Antichrist; and with Antichrist, he receives such plagues of God and disorder among men as are this day set before our eyes to behold in all places throughout the universal world and have been likewise even from the beginning.

Adam was placed in Paradise (Gen 2:8), being a creature most perfect and abounding in all wisdom and heavenly knowledge. But at the

¹ **concord** – harmony; agreement between persons.

² **replenished** – filled.

³ **vainglory** – boastfulness.

⁴ **dissimulation** – deception.

persuasion of his wife, he measured obedience by his own reason rather than by the word and sentence of God before pronounced (Gen 2:15-17); and behold, he was not only spoiled of wisdom and knowledge; he became a very fool in comparison to what he was before. And suddenly destitute⁵ of all other singular gifts, such as innocence and immortality, he was confounded at the voice of the Lord; he was ashamed of his own nakedness; and he felt the dreadful indignation and curse of God, which he had procured,⁶ not only to himself, but upon all his posterity after him.

When the entire world was so corrupted in their own ways in the days of faithful Noah, no regard at all was given to the obedience of the living Lord nor yet to the godly admonitions of just Noah. But every man was drowned in his own lusts, so that the space of a hundred and twenty years was not sufficient to move them to repentance (Gen 6-7). Therefore, they could not escape the strange and horrible judgment of God, which immediately followed most justly. And though that wicked generation abounded in all kinds of wickedness against God and man, to such a degree that the earth might then be thought of as a very hell, yet from whence proceeded all that rebellion against God's mighty majesty? Was it not only that they measured all things after their own corrupt reason and not by His holy laws and precepts? They had received His laws and precepts from their forefathers, heard them from Noah, yes, and had them engrafted naturally in their hearts. The reprobation⁷ whereof might easily be deduced from all ages even to our time by innumerable and evident examples if it were needful in so plain a matter (Rom 1:24-32). For who is so blind that he cannot see how man never shows his rebellion so much as when he would be most obedient in his *own* sight and judgment—not measuring his obedience by the straight line and true touchstone, which is the Law and Word of God, but suffering himself to be led by his own corrupt judgment and affections? This turned the wisdom of the Gentiles into mere foolishness, inventing shameful idolatry for true worship as the Apostle witnesses (Rom 1:25).

This blinded the Jews with hypocrisy and cloaked holiness, making the Law of the living Lord give place to their invented traditions by man (Mat 15:1-20). From out of the stinking puddle of man's brain have issued forth such great diversity of opinions and dangerous heresies by which the church of God has been horribly tormented at all

⁵ **destitute** – completely lacking.

⁶ **procured** – obtained with special care or effort.

⁷ **reprobation** – condemnation.

times. And, finally, from that, Antichrist has filled his pestilent⁸ cup of all sorts of deadly poison, whereof he has made almost the whole earth and her kings and princes, not only to drink, but to be most vilely overcome and drunk. In whose defense, they have armed themselves against the Lord and Christ His Son (Psa 2). With imprudent mouths, they profess Christ, whereas indeed they persecute Him most cruelly and His saints by all means possible. They fight as men in a rage under the banner of that filthy beast. And yet these men in the middle of their fury, without all obedience and order, subverting the laws of God and of nature, notwithstanding will be called the defenders of the faith, maintainers of true religion, authors of peace, teachers of obedience, and most discreet governors of commonwealths and policy.

Therefore, to the intent that these distinguished persons, who abuse the whole world, may appear in their [true] character and be known as they are indeed, I have thought it good, having occasion by this worthy answer of Peter and John to write of true obedience, namely, what God Himself requires of us and what He commands to be given to men. Whereby (God willing) the disguised cloaks and crafty pretenses of obedience, used and practiced by the ungodly worldlings, shall be revealed. They have sought always and do seek under the pleasant name of *obedience* only to maintain their ambition, pride, and liberty. By that, we shall learn how in times past we have been shamefully abused in yielding to the willful will of man, in obeying his ungodly commandments, and fearing man more than God. Finally, having more light and fuller knowledge, we shall learn how it behooves⁹ us to repent our former ignorance and to redress¹⁰ the same with diligence.

That we may have more sensible feeling of all these things, let us diligently consider this answer of St. Peter and St. John—to *whom* it was made and upon *what* occasion: “Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Act 4:19). These two apostles, through the malice of the priests, the governor of the Temple, and the Sadducees, were violently thrown into prison the night before (Act 4:14); for they had been preaching the resurrection from death in the name of Jesus to the people at Jerusalem in the porch of Solomon. The next day following, they were set forth and presented to the whole Senate and Council of Jerusalem. All the chief rulers and elders of the people of Israel, Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander—men of

⁸ **pestilent** – morally, socially, or politically harmful.

⁹ **it behooves** – it is necessary for.

¹⁰ **redress** – correct and put right.

great reputation—with others of the kindred of the high Bishop, would examine the apostles: in whose name or power had they cured the lame cripple? He was more than 40 years old, lame from his birth, and brought daily to the porch of Solomon to beg his alms.¹¹ Peter, who replenished him with the Holy Spirit, answered with great boldness that they wrought that miracle in the name and power of Jesus Christ the true Nazarite. The Jews had crucified Him, and God had raised Him from the dead. The mouths of the whole Council were stopped and had nothing to say against them; but as men astonished, they wondered at the constant boldness of Peter and John in their answer.

St. Luke then reports that the whole Council, that is, all these fore-named magistrates, by common consent straitly charged¹² the apostles Peter and John thereafter not to speak to any man so much as once, much less to preach in the name of Jesus! They thought by this means to stop the course of the gospel and hinder the glory of Christ. They had crucified Him as a malefactor¹³ and blasphemer of God's Name. And although they were destitute of all reason and Scripture to answer the apostles, who had already confounded them, yet through authority and punishment that they threatened, they thought craftily to put the apostles to silence and so at length to obtain the victory. As we see this day, the Papists—the Pharisees' successors—are express enemies of the gospel. They are sworn soldiers of Antichrist. And being overcome with the manifest Scriptures and their blasphemous mouths stopped with the truth of God's Word, they fight maliciously against Christ. They do so with power, authority, threatening, horrible punishments, and cruel murder. Therefore, they resemble that old serpent, whose brood they are: he was a murderer from the beginning (Joh 8:15).

But when the whole assembly had craftily consulted and wrought all that they could against the faithful servants of God, they were nevertheless disappointed from their purpose. For the glory of Christ shined more brightly; the truth of His gospel was better known and published farther; and their falsehood and raging madness were more apparent and abhorred by the godly. What extreme madness it was to set themselves against God! They trusted in their own power as though they were able to resist and overcome the power of the Almighty, which is the gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, as the apostle witnesses (Rom 1:16)! To think that the threatening of men should prevail more with the apostles of Christ than the threatening of God and His horrible

¹¹ **alms** – anything given freely to assist the poor.

¹² **straitly charged** – severely threatened.

¹³ **malefactor** – criminal.

judgments appointed for the disobedient! The Jews could not destroy Christ and His doctrine while He was mortal and lived amongst them in the flesh...yet would they think they could bring that to pass when He was risen again by His mighty power and made immortal? If they could not keep Him in the grave for all their diligent watch when He was dead and buried, did they think it possible to pluck Him down from heaven, from the right hand of His Father where He sits and reigns in everlasting glory? O vain and foolish men! Jesus has already overcome the entire world!

Christ has cast forth from it the chief prince and ruler, Satan, who is no longer able to prevail against His truth and servants. Are you more subtle or stronger than Satan, who is your lord and master so long as you fight against Christ the Son of God? If so mighty a Prince as Christ withstood his power, do you lewd soldiers of Satan think to obtain the victory? Death, which no man can escape, could not hold Christ! Neither could the power of hell prevail against Him. Yet would you have Him at *your* commandment, most malicious and traitorously fighting against His honor...? But, O miserable and vile wretches, double is your condemnation in the sight of God. You are not content to forsake Christ yourselves, but you maliciously labor to frustrate others of His most comfortable graces with your threatening. Full well does our Savior Christ paint forth your raging envy, saying, “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Mat 23:13).

From *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed by Their Subjects*,
modern edition by Patrick S. Poole from the 1558 edition.

Christopher Goodman (c. 1519-1602): English Puritan minister, who was co-pastor with John Knox of the English church in Geneva; born in Chester, England, UK.



If war breaks out...I will not reprove those who defend themselves against the murderous and bloodthirsty papists, nor let anyone else rebuke them as being seditious, but I will accept their action and let it pass as self-defense. I will direct them in this matter to the law and to the jurists. For in such an instance, when the murderers and bloodhounds wish to wage war and to murder, it is in truth no insurrection to rise against them and defend oneself.—*Martin Luther*

THE DUTY OF LESSER MAGISTRATES

Matthew J. Trewhella

DUTY is a word not often mentioned in our nation today. Expediency¹ prevails. The path of least resistance is the path that most follow in our day, whether in private or public life. Commitment is a virtue long lost on Americans. Just consider the divorce rate if you doubt this.

Duty is that which a person owes to another, or by which a person is bound to another, by any natural, moral, or lawful obligation to perform. Duty is any action required by one's position or by moral or lawful considerations.

A magistrate is a person clothed with power as a public civil officer—whether executive, legislative, or judicial.² As the title implies, a lesser magistrate is one who possesses *less power* than a higher magistrate. For example, a county executive possesses less authority than a state governor. The position of the lesser magistrate can be obtained by election or by appointment.

The *primary duty* of the lesser magistrates regarding the doctrine of the lesser magistrates is threefold. First, they are to oppose and resist any laws or edicts from the higher authority that contravene³ the Law or Word of God. Second, they are to protect the person, liberty, and property of those who reside within their jurisdiction from any unjust or immoral laws or actions by the higher authority. Third, they are not to implement any laws or decrees made by the higher authority that violate the Constitution, and if necessary, resist them.

They cannot hide behind the excuse “I’m just doing my job” or “I’m just following the law of the land” as an attempt to escape their duty. The duty of the lesser magistrate is to uphold that which is right in the sight of God and to protect the people where his local authority or function resides. This is a *sacred* duty. We define it as sacred because it is founded in Scripture and proceeds from God.

When we speak of *lesser* magistrates we are usually talking about a more *local* authority. Whatever the local authority may be, its jurisdiction is smaller than the higher authority that legislate an unjust or

¹ **expediency** – quality of being convenient and practical, even if improper or immoral.

² Black, *Dictionary*, 857.

³ **contravene** – conflict with; contradict.

immoral decree. Whether a governor or a state legislature standing in defiance of the President or Congress or the Supreme Court, or whether a mayor or city council standing in defiance of the governor or Congress or state legislature, the authority of the lesser magistrate is more local than the higher magistrate.

Lesser magistrates are not to just unquestioningly do the bidding of the higher authority. State governments, for example, were never intended to be mere conduits⁴ or implementation centers for Federal government regulation, law, and policy as they have become today.

Herbert Schlossberg⁵ speaks to this point in his magnum opus,⁶ *Idols for Destruction*. He says regarding the lesser magistrates, “The framers of the American Constitution were conscious of the excesses to which centralized political systems were prone,⁷ and their solution was to devise multiple levels of authority. The existence of states, cities, counties, townships, and independent taxing authorities, which, to apologists for the state, has been a messy derogation⁸ from beneficent centralized power, has saved us from some of the assaults on freedom that others have suffered.”⁹

Schlossberg points out, however, that in our day these “intermediate institutions, which formerly served to check the central power, have largely atrophied.¹⁰¹¹ He later concludes: “After three-quarters of a century, the new nationalism has borne bitter fruit. People who have despised the right of localities to govern themselves have delivered them into the hands of federal masters. Local politicians have acquiesced¹² in the mugging of the provinces because in return for giving up political authority they have received monetary benefits.”¹³

In other words, with the shekels come the shackles. The Federal master has bought off the lesser magistrates, so they more readily do *its* bidding, rather than the people’s. The lesser authorities become mere implementation centers of Federal policy.

The lesser magistrates in America today need to be reminded that a

⁴ **conduits** – persons or organizations that function as a channel for transmitting something.

⁵ **Herbert Schlossberg** (1935-2019) – historian and senior analyst in the CIA.

⁶ **magnum opus** – the most important work of an artist, musician, or writer.

⁷ **prone** – likely to do.

⁸ **derogation** – lessening of the power or authority of.

⁹ Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 213.

¹⁰ **atrophied** – gradually declined in effectiveness.

¹¹ Schlossberg, *Idols*, 212.

¹² **acquiesced** – accepted without protest.

¹³ Schlossberg, *Idols*, 214.

magistrate who upholds or follows an unjust or immoral law becomes *complicit in the higher authorities' rebellion against God*. Salisbury¹⁴ rightly declared in *Policraticus*: “Loyal shoulders should sustain the power of the ruler *so long as it is exercised in subjection to God and follows His ordinances*; but if it resists and opposes the divine commandments and wishes to make me share in its war against God, then with unrestrained voice, I answer back that *God must be preferred before any man on earth*.”¹⁵

The resistance offered by lesser magistrates is wise and proper. Peasant revolts are easily put down by governments and suppressed. They lack the cohesion and order necessary to offer a successful resistance to tyranny by an organized central power. The following list¹⁶ demonstrates why resistance by lesser magistrates is wise and necessary to turn back acts of tyranny by the higher authority:

1) Lesser magistrates already possess lawful, God-given authority which they may invoke.

2) Lesser magistrates have been supported by many in their successful bid to achieve office; therefore, they have an established power base of popular support already in place.

3) Lesser magistrates usually have constitutional precedent and law on their side; so that, in other words, there is some heritage or history to which they can appeal.

4) Lesser magistrates already have access to a public forum by which they can articulate the particulars of the grievances involved.

5) Lesser magistrates, by virtue of their office, can address the pangs of conscience, doubt, and indecision of the people when they see tyranny developing in their nation and see the need for resistance. People respond to honorable and authoritative leadership, so they recognize the lesser magistrates' God-given authority to resist unjust and immoral law and can rally behind them.

6) Lesser magistrates can provide relief and refuge, protection and support for the distressed more readily than can ordinary individuals, becoming, by their office, an instrument of temporal deliverance/salvation for the distressed. This is institutionalized deliverance, a theme reiterated in Scripture repeatedly.

7) Lesser magistrates can strike terror into the hearts of oppressors,

¹⁴ **John of Salisbury** (c. 1115-1180) – medieval philosopher, churchman, and scholar.

¹⁵ Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 258.

¹⁶ This is a modified list from original. Wayne C. Sedlak, *Interposition: Revolt of the Lesser Magistrate* (Vision Viewpoint, 1997), Web.

flushing them out into the open and exposing them for promoting what is evil; even as they attack the lesser magistrate's position in office and further their injustice.

8) Lesser magistrates have the best chance of resolving injustice without upheaval or bloodshed. A tyrannical government is less anxious to push their oppression if they know that the opposition has *the proper leadership and order of lesser magistrates*. When the lesser magistrates refuse to comply with unjust or immoral law, the matter can often be resolved in favor of what is right without armed revolution or bloodshed being necessary.

9) God declares a willingness to support such magistrates in their capacity and office¹⁷ because they represent what God instituted government to be—a picture of true justice to the culture and citizenry at large and an empowered and proper deliverance against the onslaughts of oppression and evil. Such a position gives people hope and a foundation upon which to erect a just and upright system of constitutional protections and proper “due process” of law as bulwarks against tyranny.

Lesser magistrates, by virtue of their office, constitute *lawful* authority. When the lesser magistrate stands against unjust or immoral law made by a superior, his actions benefit those under his jurisdiction, as well as the nation as a whole.

Simply put, the lesser magistrates provide order when the superior authority acts unjustly or immorally, and its abuse of power needs to be quelled.¹⁸

From *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2013), 15-19.

Matthew J. Trehwella: Protestant author, prolife advocate, and pastor of Mercy Seat Christian Church, in Richfield, Wisconsin, USA.



We are also to honor magistrates, both by praying for them and paying tribute to them. The former is our duty, and the latter is their due: “I exhort,” saith the apostle, “that supplications, prayers...be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority” (1Ti 2:1-2). The burden that lieth on them is weighty; we had need therefore beg of God to strengthen their backs, otherwise they can never bear it. There is a truth in that saying, “Did men but know the weight of a crown, they would not stoop to take it up.”—*George Swinnock*

¹⁷ Romans 13:1-4.

¹⁸ **quelled** – put to an end.

APPEAL TO THE EMPEROR

The Magdeburg Confession (1550)

IT is now all the more needful that we should prove by our defense whether a Christian magistrate¹ can or ought to preserve his state and the Christian teachers and hearers in it against his own superior magistrate,² and drive off by force one who is using force to compel people to reject the true doctrine and true worship of God and to accept idolatry...

We call Charles Caesar³ to witness, our most merciful lord, that you do not allow the popish forces so to abuse your majesty and power to expel, nay rather, to crucify Christ—Christ Who, since He Himself has given you this most prosperous kingdom that you have, is now your guest in it, poor, rejected, and full of troubles in His members, i.e., His disciples. [We are] beseeching your faithfulness in the administration of the realm that has been entrusted to you. [We are] not seeking that any part of the kingdom or glory be returned to Him, but that defense or freedom from punishment be allowed, so that He may repay your faithfulness in these gifts with greater gifts in eternal life.

And if, stricken in your conscience, you are not yet able to consider us as disciples of Christ, we beseech you to think of your piety, that Christ, when He was handed over to be crucified by the chief priests among His people, was not considered as the Son of God, but as a blasphemer and a seditious man. Likewise, the apostles and other martyrs were always so considered and murdered by the usual authorities. Likewise, the Lord predicted this outcome in John 16: “They shall put you out of the synagogues” and “the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (Joh 16:2).

In this utterance, He also hands down the mark of the false church, i.e., that it will spread its religion with weapons. The true Church has never taught that men ought to be forced, even to true piety, by weapons. In the same manner, you yourself allow the Jews and pagans who obey your rule to follow their own religion; you do not force them with weapons to accept yours.

¹ The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (1500-1558), the lesser magistrate to the pope.

² Pope Paul III (1468-1549), the emperor’s superior; Romanism taught the supremacy of the pope over all other authorities on earth.

³ Charles V.

We poor wretches, since we are called Lutherans, are more unfortunate than these. Why have we been deprived of this kindness of yours? Together with you, with one mouth and one heart, we preach Christ, our shared Redeemer and Savior; and we embrace all the articles of the Christian faith. We are divided only in this: to you who have been persuaded so by the papal party, we seem to ascribe to Christ *too much of the merit and glory in justification*; and because we judge that He ought to be worshipped only according to His own Word, while you think that He also ought to be worshipped in more ways, and you force us to worship Him according to human traditions. See therefore, I beseech you, Caesar Augustus, how serious this matter will be for you in the last judgment of Christ, in which you will render an account to Him for all your deeds; you will receive what your deeds have deserved. Consider what will happen to you if you, a Christian, are a persecutor of Christians, true members of Christ, because they seemed to you to extol Christ and His Word with excessive praise.

As for other matters relating to your rule, we will gladly render obedience—as much as we are able, and we owe you. The profession of our religion has diminished nothing from it; so that much true dignity and encouragement for the obedience owed rather flows from it for you. For we teach with the apostle Paul that you are the vicarious⁴ minister of God for promoting good works and that obedience is owed to you in this role, just as to God, not only because of wrath or fear of your sword, but also because of conscience, that is, fear of the wrath and judgment of God.

Although we cannot consider that all men equally comply with this doctrine, nor can we bring that about ourselves, nonetheless we can promise you this with the strength of a promise that is said about our ministry—“My word...shall not return unto me void” (Isa 55:11); likewise, “Your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58)—that we will give from our churches the greatest possible number of men who, if they be able to enjoy their own religion through you, will declare their obedience toward you in all owed and upright duties, and loyalty without hypocrisy, out of true love—not so much love of receiving fruit from you, as love of you yourself, perhaps more than all those whom you say are obedient to you, so that you mistakenly mark us for the crime of [disobedience] and rebellion.

Although we are not able to look into the hearts of individuals, still, let us plainly affirm this about the city’s general attitude and will: that

⁴ vicarious – authorized; delegated.

except for the preservation of our religion, nothing else is sought; that when this is gained, our Senate and citizens will be most obedient in all their proper duties according to your Majesty's laws. If the public's attitude and will did not seem altogether this way to us, rest assured that we would either force this whole Church to desist from what it has begun, by excommunication according to the command of Christ; or else, we would shake the dust off our feet and leave this city. We command them by the word of Christ to render unto God the things that are God's and to Caesar—though he be different in religion—the things that are Caesar's (Mat 22:17-21). They render these duties of double obedience and conduct themselves without crime of their consciences on either side and without rancor,⁵ when both sides keep themselves within the limits of their duty prescribed by God and by the laws. Again, when there is a departure on either side from these limits, then horrible sins and severe unrest cannot but arise. In this way now, you, Charles Caesar, are exceeding the limits of your dominion, and you are extending it into the dominion of Christ. Therefore, you yourself are the cause of these disturbances, just as Elijah once said to Ahab...All that is left for us to do is to entreat your Majesty Caesar Augustus, by the passion, cross, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose memory we celebrate together with you. By His most just and severe final judgment, we urge you to cease at last from proscribing and persecuting us and other innocent Christians over a matter in which we are bound and obligated by Christ, your Lord and ours.

Therefore, we again affirm from the sure Word of God that when superior magistrates attempt to force papistical idolatry upon their citizens to overwhelm the true worship of God and His true worshippers, just as they have now begun to do, by unjust maneuvers with their laws, even if they pretend otherwise—then pious magistrates are not only able, but even have an obligation to resist them as far as they are able, to defend the true doctrine, worship of God, life, modesty, and the property of their subjects, and preserve them against such great tyranny.

From *The Magdeburg Confession* (1550), Matthew Colvin, trans. (N. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Publishing, 2012), 49-53; used by permission.

The Magdeburg Confession (1550): One of the most important documents in Reformation political history; written by German Lutheran pastors, including Nicolaus von Amsdorf—a friend and supporter of Luther.



⁵ **rancor** – feeling of deep and bitter anger and ill-will.

APPEAL TO NOBLES & MAGISTRATES

John Knox (c. 1514-1572)

TO the nobility and estates of Scotland, John Knox wishes grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the spirit of righteous judgment.

It is not only the love of temporal life (Right Honorable), neither yet the fear of corporeal death, that moves me at this time to explain unto you the injuries done against me and to crave of you, as of lawful powers appointed by God, relief from the same. But partly it proceeds from the reverence that every man owes to God's eternal truth, and partly from a love that I bear to your salvation and to the salvation of my brethren abused in that realm by such as have no fear of God before their eyes. It has pleased God, of His infinite mercy, not only so to illuminate the eyes of my mind, and so to touch my dull heart, that I see clearly and by His grace sincerely believe, that there is no other name given to men under the heaven, in which salvation consisteth, save the name of Jesus alone (Act 4:12): Who, by the sacrifice that He did once offer upon the cross, hath sanctified forever those that shall inherit the kingdom promised (Heb 10:12-13). But it has also pleased Him, of His superabundant grace, to make and appoint me, most wretched of many thousands, a witness, minister, and preacher of the same doctrine, the summary whereof I did not spare to communicate with my brethren (being with them in the realm of Scotland in the year 1556) because I know myself to be a steward (1Co 3) and that accounts of the talent committed to my charge shall be required by Him Who will admit no vain excuse that fearful men pretend (Mat 25). I did, therefore as God did minister, during the time I was associating with them (God is record and witness) truly and sincerely, according to the gift granted unto me, divide the word of salvation, teaching all men to hate sin, which before God was and is so odious that none other sacrifice could satisfy His justice except the death of His only Son; and to magnify the great mercies of our heavenly Father, Who did not spare the Substance of His own glory, but did give Him to the world to suffer the shameful and cruel death of the cross, by that means to reconcile His chosen children to Himself (Joh 3:16-17; Rom 5, 8; 2Co 5:18-19); teaching further what is the duty of such as do believe themselves purged by such a price from their former filthiness, namely, that they are bound to walk in the newness of life, fighting against the lusts of the flesh, and

studying at all times to glorify God by such good works as He has prepared for His children to walk in (Rom 6; Eph 4-5; 2:10). In doctrine, I did further affirm (so taught by my Master Christ Jesus) that whosoever denieth Him, yes, or is ashamed of Him before this wicked generation, him shall Christ Jesus deny, and of him shall He be ashamed when He shall appear in His majesty (Mat 10:33). And therefore, I feared not to affirm that it is of necessity, that such as hope for life everlasting avoid all superstition, vain religion, and idolatry. Vain religion and idolatry I call whatsoever is done in God's service or honor without the express commandment of His own Word.

This doctrine I did believe to be so conformable to God's holy scriptures that I thought no creature could have been so impudent as to have damned any point or article of the same. Yet, nevertheless, your false bishops and ungodly clergy have damned me as a heretic and this doctrine as heretical, pronouncing against me a sentence of death, in testifying whereof they have burned a picture.¹ From which false and cruel sentence and from all judgment of that wicked generation, I make it known to your honors that I appeal to a lawful and general council (to such, I mean, as the most ancient laws and canons do approve to be held...), most humbly requiring of your Honors that (as God has appointed you princes in that people and, by reason thereof, requires of your hands the defense of innocents troubled in your dominion), in the meantime and until the controversies that this day be in religion be lawfully decided, you receive me and such others, as most unjustly persecuted by those cruel beasts, in your defense and protection.

Your Honors are not ignorant that it is not I alone who does sustain this cause against the pestilent generation of papists; but that...together with many other cities and churches reformed, appeal from the tyranny of that Antichrist and most earnestly do call for a lawful and general council, wherein all controversies in religion may be decided by the authority of God's most sacred Word. And unto this same, as I said, do I appeal yet once again, requiring of your Honors to hold my simple and plain appeal of no less value nor effect, than if it had been made with greater circumstance, solemnity, and ceremony; and that you receive me calling unto you, as to the powers of God ordained, in your protection and defense against the rage of tyrants not to maintain me in any iniquity, error, or false opinion, but to let me have such equity as God by His Word, ancient laws, and determinations of most godly councils, grant to men accused or defamed.

¹ The bishops burned Knox in effigy, i.e., they burned a picture of him.

The Word of God wills that no man shall die except he be found criminal and worthy of death for an offence committed, of the which he must be manifestly convicted by two or three witnesses (Deu 17:6-7). Ancient laws do permit just defense to such as are accused (be their crimes never so horrible); and godly councils will that neither bishop nor ecclesiastical person whatsoever, accused of any crime, shall sit in judgment, consultation, or council, where the cause of such men as do accuse them is to be tried.

These things I require of your Honors to be granted unto me, namely, that the doctrine, which our adversaries condemn for heresy, may be tried by the simple and plain Word of God; that just defenses be admitted to us that sustain the battle against this pestilent generation of Antichrist; and that they be removed from judgment in our cause, seeing that our accusation is not intended against any one particular person, but against that whole kingdom, which we doubt not to prove to be a power usurped against God, against His commandment, and against the ordinance of Christ Jesus established in His church by His chief apostles. Yes, we doubt not to prove the kingdom of the pope to be the kingdom and power of Antichrist. And therefore, my lords, I cannot cease in the name of Christ Jesus to require of you that the matter may come in examination; and that you, the estates of the realm, by your authority, compel such as will be called bishops, not only to desist from their cruel murdering of such as do study to promote God's glory in detecting and disclosing the damnable ungodliness of that man of sin (the Roman Antichrist), but also that you compel them to answer to such crimes as shall be laid to their charge for not righteously instructing the flock committed to their cares...

I will stand content for this time to show that it is lawful to God's prophets and to preachers of Christ Jesus to appeal from the sentence and judgment of the visible church to the knowledge of the temporal magistrate, who by God's law is bound to hear their causes and to defend them from tyranny.

From "The Appellation" in *The Works of John Knox*, Vol.4 (Edinburgh; J. Thin, 1854), 467-472; updated by Kevin Reed, Copyright © 1995.

John Knox (c. 1514-1572): Scottish pastor, theologian, and reformer; born at Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland, UK.



GOVERNMENT AND LIBERTY

Isaac Backus (1724-1806)

As the affairs of government and liberty are the greatest points of controversy now in the world, it certainly is of great importance that our ideas be clear and just concerning them. Permit me therefore to offer a few thoughts upon a familiar metaphor, which the Holy Ghost has used to illustrate their true nature. In Amos 5:24, He says, "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." From whence we may observe,

First, that judgment and righteousness are essential to freedom. When we would represent anything as quite free, we say, "It is as free as water." And not only the flow of mercy and grace from God to men, but also its effects in them in producing obedience unto Him are often compared thereto in the Word of truth (Joh 4:14; 7:38; Ti 2:11-12; 3:5-8). This is most certain because,

Second, freedom is not acting at random, but by reason and rule. Those who walk after their own lusts are clouds without water, "carried about of winds," or "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame" (Jude 1:12-13); while the true Sons of Liberty are like streams, which run down in a clear and steady channel. David says, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psa 119:32). "I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts" (Psa 119:45). Streams and rivers must have steady channels to run in; but they that promise liberty while they despise government are "wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest" (2Pe 2:10-19).

Third, though tyranny and immorality often make a great noise, yet government and liberty are much stronger than they are. The former, like raging waves, dash themselves against the rocks and die upon the shore. Or like a tempest, after making sad waste and devastation, their strength is gone, and their force is over. While the latter, like a mighty stream, carry all before them and never rest until they can get through or over all obstacles that are put in their way.

Fourth, streams and rivers are of great use and cause a constant flow of refreshment and blessings wherever they come. So does the exercise and administration of judgment and righteousness among all people that enjoy them. Hence,

Fifth, the command of heaven is, "Let them run down; put no

obstruction in their way.” No, rather be in earnest to remove everything that hinders their free course.

Sixth, the context plainly shows that a main obstruction to these great blessings among the people then spoken to was their assuming a power to govern religion instead of being governed by it. True religion is a voluntary obedience unto God. And the great design of all ordinances and acts of worship towards Him is that thereby we may obtain pardon and cleansing with direction and assistance to behave as we ought towards our fellowmen. But instead of this, those people added their own inventions to divine institutions and substituted their acts of devotion towards God in the place of a righteous practice towards men or for a cover to their contrary conduct. And they would gladly have been thought very religious, although they turned judgment into bitterness, hated him that rebuked in the gate, and abhorred him that spoke uprightly (Amo 5:7, 10). These things were written for our admonition (1Co 10:11); and all things of that nature, if indulged, will prove as destructive to us as they did to the Jews. And since self-interest and self-flattery have an amazing influence on blind men concerning their own conduct in these affairs, great care ought to be taken to guard against deception therein. And close attention to two recent publications from the ruling party in this state may be particularly useful in that respect.

Eleven years ago, the Episcopal clergy appeared very earnest for having bishops established in America. This caused Dr. Chauncy¹ of Boston to write an answer the next year to what Dr. Chandler² had published upon that subject. Chandler had declared that all they wanted was only to have their church completely organized without the least design of injuring others.

The best reason that Chauncy could give, as to why Chandler's request ought not to be granted, was this: says he, “We are, in principle, against all civil establishments in religion. It does not appear to us that God has entrusted the state with a right to make religious establishments...Hath the state of England been distinguished by heaven by any peculiar grant beyond the state in other countries? If it has, let the grant be produced. If it has not, all states have in common the same authority in establishments conformable to their own sentiments in religion. What can the consequence be but infinite damage to the cause of God and true religion!

And such in fact has been the consequence of these establishments

¹ **Charles Chauncy** (1705-1787) – Congregational preacher who later became a Unitarian.

² **Thomas Bradbury Chandler** (1726-1790) – American priest of the Church of England.

in all ages and in all places. Should it be said, we claim liberty of conscience and fully enjoy it; and why would we confine this privilege to ourselves? Is it not as reasonable that Episcopalians should both claim and enjoy it? It is readily allowed; we are as willing that they should possess and exercise religious liberty in its full extent as we desire to do it ourselves. But then, let it be heedfully minded: we claim no right to desire the interposition³ of the state to establish that mode of worship, government, or discipline that we apprehend is most agreeable to the mind of Christ. We desire no other liberty than to be left unrestrained in the exercise of our principles, as far as we are good members of society. And we are perfectly willing that Episcopalians should enjoy this liberty to the full. If they think bishops, in their appropriate sense, were constituted by Christ or His apostles, we object not a word against their having as many of them as they please if they will be content to have them with authority altogether derived from Christ. But they both claim and desire a great deal more. They want to be distinguished by having bishops upon the footing of a state-establishment. The plain truth is, by the gospel-charter, all professed Christians are vested with precisely the same rights; nor has one denomination any more a right to the interposition of the civil magistrate in their favor than another; and wherever this difference takes place, it is outside the rule of Scripture, and I may say also, the genuine dictates of uncorrupted reason.

The importance of religion to civil society and government is great indeed...The fear and reverence of God and the terrors of eternity are the most powerful restraints upon the minds of men. And hence it is of special importance in a free government, the spirit of which being always friendly to the sacred rights of conscience, it will hold up the gospel as the great rule of faith and practice. Established modes and usages in religion—more especially the stated public worship of God—so generally form the principles and manners of a people that changes or alterations in these, especially when nearly conformed to the spirit and simplicity of the gospel, may well be esteemed very dangerous experiments in government.

From *Government and Liberty Described; and Ecclesiastical Tyranny Exposed*
(Boston, MA: Powars and Willis; Phillip Freeman, 1778), 3-7.

Isaac Backus (1724-1806): Baptist minister during the era of the American War for Independence; born in Yantic, Connecticut, USA.



³ **interposition** – willingly placing oneself between an oppressor and his intended victim.

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Samuel Davies (1723-1761)

KINGS and kingdoms are the most majestic sounds in the language of mortals. [They] have filled the world with noise, confusions, and blood since mankind first left the state of nature and formed themselves into societies. The disputes of kingdoms for superiority have set the world in arms from age to age and destroyed or enslaved a considerable part of the human race; and the contest is not yet decided. Our country has been a region of peace and tranquility for a long time, but it has not been because the lust of power and riches is extinct in the world, but because we had no near neighbors whose interest might clash with ours or who were able to disturb us. The absence of an enemy was our sole defense. But now, when the colonies of the sundry European nations on this continent begin to enlarge and approach towards each other, the scene is changed: now encroachments, depredations, barbarities, and all the terrors of war begin to surround and alarm us. Now our country is invaded and ravaged, and bleeds in a thousand veins. We have already,¹ so early in the year, received alarm upon alarm; and we may expect the alarms to grow louder and louder as the season advances.

These commotions and perturbations² have had one good effect upon me, and that is, they have carried away my thoughts of late into a serene and peaceful region—a region beyond the reach of confusion and violence. I mean the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. And there, my brethren, I would also transport your minds this day, as the best refuge from this boisterous³ world and the most agreeable mansion for the lovers of peace and tranquility.

I find it advantageous both to you and me to entertain you with those subjects that have made the deepest impression upon my own mind. That is the reason I choose the present subject. In my text you hear One entering a claim to a kingdom, Whom you would conclude, if you regarded only His outward appearance, to be the meanest⁴ and vilest of mankind. To hear a powerful prince at the head of a victorious army, attended with all the royalties of his character—to hear such a one

¹ This sermon was preached in Hanover, Virginia, May 9, 1756.

² **perturbations** – disturbances; mental agitations.

³ **boisterous** – loud, noisy, and lacking restraint.

⁴ **meanest** – lowliest.

claim the kingdom he had acquired by force of arms would not be strange. But here the despised Nazarene, rejected by His nation, forsaken by His followers, accused as the worst of criminals, standing defenseless at Pilate's bar, about to be condemned and hung on a cross, like a criminal and a slave, here He speaks in a royal style, even to His judge: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (Joh 18:37). Strange language indeed to proceed from His lips in these circumstances! But the truth is, a great, a divine person is concealed under this disguise; and His kingdom is of such a nature that His abasement and crucifixion were so far from being a hindrance to it that they were the only way to acquire it. These sufferings were meritorious; and by these He purchased His subjects and a right to rule them...

It is the mediatorial⁵ kingdom of Christ that is here intended, not that which as God He exercises over all the works of His hands: it is that kingdom, which is an empire of grace, an administration of mercy over our guilty world. It is the dispensation intended for the salvation of fallen sinners of our race by the gospel; and on this account the gospel is often called the kingdom of heaven, because its happy consequences are not confined to this earth, but appear in heaven in the highest perfection, and last through all eternity. Hence, not only the church of Christ on earth, and the dispensation of the gospel, but all the saints in heaven, and that more finished economy under which they are placed, are all included in the kingdom of Christ.

Here His kingdom is in its infancy, but in heaven it will be perfection; but it is substantially the same. Though the immediate design of this kingdom is the salvation of believers of the guilty race of man, and such are its subjects in a peculiar sense; yet it extends to all worlds, to heaven, and earth, and hell. The whole universe is put under a mediatorial head; but then, as the apostle observes, He is made "head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22), that is, for the benefit and salvation of His church.

As Mediator,⁶ He is carrying on a glorious scheme for the recovery of man, and all parts of the universe are interested or concern themselves

⁵ **mediatorial kingdom** – kingdom that refers to Christ's role as Mediator, or go-between, as Prophet, Priest, and King.

⁶ **Mediator** – "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all

in this grand event. Therefore, they are all subjected to Him that He may so manage them as to promote this end and baffle and overwhelm all opposition...Christ, as a Mediator, is made the head of all the heavenly armies, and He employs them as His ministering spirits to minister to them that are heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14). These glorious creatures are always on the wing ready to discharge His orders in any part of His vast empire and delight to be employed in the services of His mediatorial kingdom.

This is also an event in which the fallen angels deeply interest themselves: they have united all their force and art for near six thousand years to disturb and subvert His kingdom and to blast the designs of redeeming love. Therefore, they are all subjected to the control of Christ, and He shortens and lengthens their chains as He pleases. They cannot go a hair's breadth beyond His permission. The Scriptures represent our world in its state of guilt and misery as the kingdom of Satan. Sinners, while slaves to sin, are his subjects; and every act of disobedience against God is an act of homage to this infernal prince. Hence, Satan is called "the god of this world...the prince of this world...the power of darkness...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (2Co 4:4; Joh 12:31; Luk 22:53; Eph 2:2). And sinners are said to be "taken captive by him at his will" (2Ti 2:26). Hence also, the ministers of Christ, who are employed to recover sinners to a state of holiness and happiness, are represented as soldiers armed for war; not indeed with carnal weapons, but with those that are spiritual, plain truth arguments, and miracles! These are made "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds...casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2Co 10:3-5). And Christians in general are represented as wrestling, not with "flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph 6:12).

Hence also, the death of Christ is represented not as a defeat, but as an illustrious conquest gained over the powers of hell because, by this means, a way was opened for the deliverance of sinners from under their power and restoring them into liberty and the favor of God. By that strange contemptible weapon, the cross, and by the glorious resurrection of Jesus, He "spoiled principalities and powers...[and] made a

Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (Second London Baptist Confession, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY

shew of them openly, triumphing over them” (Col 2:15). “Through death,” says the apostle, He destroyed “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). Had not Christ by His death offered a propitiatory⁷ sacrifice for the sins of men, they would have continued forever under the tyranny of Satan; but He has purchased liberty, life, and salvation for them. Thus, He hath destroyed the kingdom of darkness and translated multitudes from it into His own gracious and glorious kingdom. Hence, upon the right of redemption, His mediatorial authority tends to the infernal regions, and He controls and restrains those malignant, mighty, and turbulent potentates according to His pleasure.

Farther, the inanimate world is connected with our Lord’s design to save sinners and is therefore subjected to Him as Mediator. He causes the sun to rise, the rain to fall, and the earth to yield her increase, to furnish provision for the subjects of His grace, and to raise, support, and accommodate heirs for His heavenly kingdom. As for the sons of men, who are more immediately concerned in this kingdom and for whose sake it was erected, they are all its subjects. But then they are of different sorts, according to their characters. Multitudes are rebels against His government; that is, they do not voluntarily submit to His authority, nor do they choose His service: they will not obey His laws. But they are His subjects notwithstanding; that is, He rules and manages them as He pleases, whether they will or not. This power is necessary to carry on successfully His gracious design towards His people; for unless He had the management of His enemies, they might baffle His undertaking and successfully counteract the purposes of His love.

The kings of the earth, as well as vulgar rebels of a private character, have often set themselves against His kingdom. Sometimes they have flattered themselves that they had demolished it. But Jesus reigns absolute and supreme over the kings of the earth and overrules and controls them as He thinks proper. He disposes all the revolutions, the rises and falls of kingdoms and empires, to be subservient to the great designs of His mediation. Their united policies and powers cannot frustrate the work that He has undertaken.

But besides these rebellious involuntary subjects, He has—blessed be His name!—gained the consent of thousands, and they have become His willing subjects by their own choice. They regard His authority, they love His government, they make it their study to please Him, and

⁷ **propitiatory** – To propitiate is to satisfy divine justice and thus to appease God’s wrath; in the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice.

to do His will. Over these, He exercises a government of special grace here, and He will make them the happy subjects of the kingdom of His glory hereafter. And it is His government over these that I intend more particularly to consider.

Once more, the kingdom of Jesus is not confined to this world, but the millions of mankind in the invisible world are under His dominion, and will continue so to everlasting ages. He is the “Lord both of the dead and the living” (Rom 14:9) and has the keys of Hades, the vast invisible world (including heaven as well as hell) and of death (Rev 1:18). He turns the key and opens the door of death for mortals to pass from world to world; He opens the gates of heaven and welcomes and admits the nations that keep the commandments of God; and He opens the prison of hell and locks it fast upon the prisoners of divine justice. He will forever exercise authority over the vast regions of the unseen world, and the unnumbered multitudes of spirits with which they are peopled.

Hence, you see, my brethren, the universal extent of the Redeemer’s kingdom! In this respect, how much does it differ from all the kingdoms of the earth? The kingdoms of Great Britain, France, China, Persia are but little spots of the globe. Our world has indeed been oppressed in former times with what mortals call universal monarchies. Such were the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and especially the Roman. But in truth, these were so far from being strictly universal that a considerable part of the habitable earth was not so much as known to them. But this is an empire strictly universal. It extends over land and sea; it reaches beyond the planetary worlds and all the luminaries of heaven; nay, beyond the throne of the most exalted archangels and downward to the lowest abyss in hell. A universal empire in the hands of a mortal is a huge, unwieldy thing; a heap of confusion; a burden to mankind; and it has always rushed headlong from its glory and fallen to pieces by its own weight. But Jesus is equal to the immense province of an empire strictly universal. His hand can hold the reins; and it is the blessing of our world to be under His administration. He will turn what appears to us scenes of confusion into perfect order, and convince all worlds that He has not taken one wrong step in the whole plan of His infinite government...

There are various parts of the heathen world where the gospel has never yet been; and the Jews have never yet been converted as a nation. But you will find the calling of the Jews and the fulness of the Gentiles plainly foretold in the 11th chapter to the Romans...Posterity shall see this glorious event in some happy future period. How far it is from us, I will not determine. Though, upon some grounds, I apprehend it is

not very remote. I shall live and die in the unshaken belief that our guilty world shall yet see glorious days! Yes, my brethren, this despised gospel that has so little effect in our age and country, shall yet shine like lightning or like the sun through all the dark regions of the earth. It shall triumph over... all those dangerous errors that have infected the Christian church... The scheme of providence is not yet completed, and much remains to be accomplished of what God has spoken by His prophets to ripen the world for the universal judgment. But when all these things are finished, then proclamation shall be made through all nature that time shall be no more! Then the Supreme Judge, the same Jesus that ascended the cross, will ascend the throne and review the affairs of time. Then will He put an end to the present course of nature and the present form of administration. Then shall heaven and hell be filled with their respective inhabitants. Then will time close and eternity run on in one uniform tenor⁸ without end. But the kingdom of Christ, though altered in its situation and form of government, will not then come to its conclusion. His kingdom is strictly the kingdom of heaven; and at the end of this world, His subjects will only be removed from these lower regions into a more glorious country, where they and their King shall live together forever in the most endearing intimacy—where the noise and commotions of this restless world, the revolutions and perturbations of kingdoms, the terrors of war and persecution, shall no longer reach them! But all will be perfect peace, love, and happiness through immeasurable duration. This is the last and most illustrious state of the kingdom of Christ, now so small and weak in appearance. This is the final grand result of His administration; and it will appear to admiring worlds wisely planned, gloriously executed, and perfectly finished.

What conqueror ever erected such a kingdom! What subjects so completely, so lastingly happy, as those of the blessed Jesus!

From *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era (1730-1805)*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, foreword copyright 1991), 179-206;
individual sermons in the public domain.

Samuel Davies (1723-1761): Presbyterian minister; born near Summit Ridge, New Castle County, Delaware, USA.



⁸ **tenor** – settled, prevailing character.