

Emmaus Essentials
The London Baptist Confession of 1689
Chapter 24: Of the Civil Magistrate
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Chapter Outline taken from *ST 535 Baptist Symbolics Chapter Outlines* by Dr. Renihan

Introduction

What is the role of the civil authority? And what obligations to Christians have to obey civil authority?

Living in two kingdoms is not always easy!

I. Paragraph 1 - The Basis of the Civil Magistracy

"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 defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers."

(Romans 13:1-4)

- A. The Lordship of God is foundational - the basis of all authority is God
 - 1. "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world"
 - a) High and low, great and small - implies subordination
- B. Civil magistracy is divinely ordained (magistracy - those who have authority in the civil realm)
 - 1. For God's glory
 - a) How can an unbelieving magistrate bring glory to God
 - (1) "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." (1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV)
 - 2. For the public good
 - a) The magistrate out to ask the question, what will be for the good of these people?
- C. They have the power of the sword (this is not a chapter encouraging pacifism)
 - 1. For defense
 - 2. For the encouragement of the good
 - 3. For the punishment of evil doers

Key Texts:

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." (Romans 13:1-4, ESV)

II. Paragraph 2 - The Lawfulness of the Magistracy

"It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called there unto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace, 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.”
(2 Samuel 23:3; Psalms 82:3, 4; Luke 3:14)

- A. Christians may serve as magistrates
 - 1. Some of the continental Anabaptists denied that Christians could serve in public office
- B. They must enforce the laws of the political entity
 - 1. Wholesome laws
- C. They may justly wage war
 - 1. It is honorable for a Christian to serve in the military and to engage in battle

Key Texts:

“The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.” (2 Samuel 23:3–4, ESV)

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.” (Psalm 82:3, ESV)

“Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” (Psalm 82:4, ESV)

“Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.’” (Luke 3:14, ESV)

III. Paragraph 3 - The Responsibilities of Citizens to Their Magistrates (taken from 1st London)

“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 sake; 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.”
(Romans 13:5-7; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2)

- A. A reminder of divine institution
 - 1. “Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid...”
- B. Subjection in the Lord must be yielded
 - 1. Not only for fear of wrath
 - 2. But also for conscience sake
- C. Prayer ought to be made for all in authority
 - 1. Family worship guide

IV. Differences Between WCF and LBC 1689

- 1. Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XXIII Para 3- Original Wording Of the Civil Magistrate
- 2. “The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.”
- B. Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 23 Para 3 - American Revision Of the Civil Magistrate

1. "(Completely rewritten) Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance."

Key Texts:

"Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." (Romans 13:5-7, ESV)

"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Peter 2:17, ESV)

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, or kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." (1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV)

Conclusion

At what point are people justified in not being peaceful in their disobedience?

I cannot say. Tyranny and injustice certainly must be opposed.

We are obligated to obey God first, and then submit to the governing authorities in that order.

"But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29, ESV)