

XXIII. The Civil Magistrate

1. *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil authorities to be, under him, over the people for his own glory and the public good. For this purpose he has armed them with the power of the sword for the defense and encouragement of those who are good, and for the punishment of those who do evil.*

2. *It is lawful for Christians to hold public office when called to it. In such office they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth. For that purpose they may now, under the new testament, lawfully wage war upon just and necessary occasion.*

A. God's dominion

This section on the civil magistrate starts with the ultimate magistrate, God, and defines his kingdom and authority.

What is the source of the authority of the civil magistrate?

B. Civil Magistrate's duties & power

1. Duties

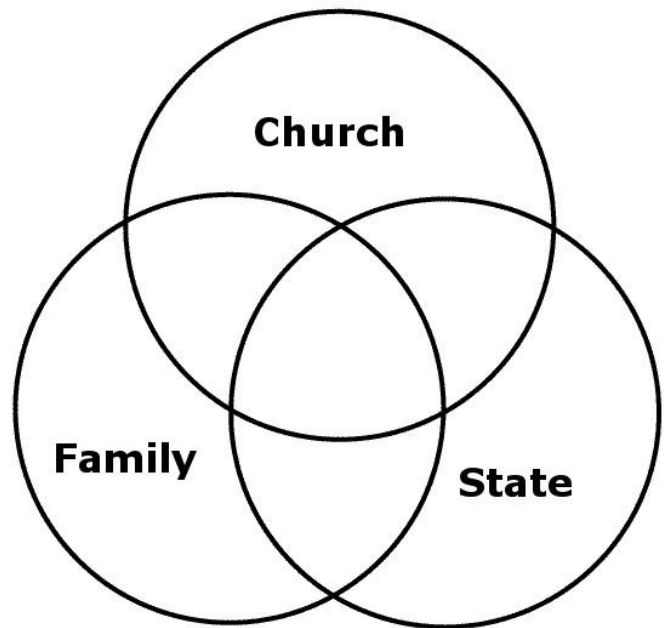
Paragraph 1 details the primary duties of the civil magistrate:

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(Romans 13:1-4)

2. Power of the sword

- War (_____ evil doers)
- Death penalty (_____ evil doers)
 - (Gen. 9:6)
 - (Acts 25:11)
 - Chapter 19 (the Law of God) paragraph 4



C. Christian magistrates

1. Problems with ungodly magistrates

Some responses Christians have had to ungodly governments:

- Withdraw from society and create your own blend of “Christian” government/church/society
- Live with civil governments but refuse to participate as rulers, elected officials, agents, military, etc.
- Only participate in government or political party that is explicitly Christian

2. Christians as godly magistrates

Examples:

Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah. Luke 3:14, Acts 10).

Duties:

- _____
- _____

*All governments are God's governments but no nation is God's chosen nation
(Chad Van Dixhoorn in Confessing the Faith)*

What type of civil government is ordained by scripture?

3. Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism is a totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs, conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation, in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ.

Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*

Problems with Christian Nationalism:

4. Just war

Pacifism definition

War not necessarily in conflict with Christianity

What are those “just” and “necessary” occasions?

Just:

Necessary:

D. Limits on Civil Magistrates

3. *Civil authorities may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, nor should they interfere in any way in matters of faith. Yet, as caring fathers, it is the duty of civil authorities to protect the church of our common Lord without giving preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest—doing so in such a way that all church authorities shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of carrying out every part of their sacred functions without violence or danger. As Jesus Christ has appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, prevent, or hinder their proper exercise among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil authorities to protect the person and good name of all their people in such an effective manner that no person be allowed, either in the name of religion or of unbelief, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatever. They should also take care that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without interference or disturbance.*

1. Limited power

2 Chron 26

2. Difference from the historic text.

Original	1788 American version
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: <u>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.</u>	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; <u>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.</u>

Why the original gave the magistrate authority over the church

Eph. 2:11-22, Eph 4:11-12

In the end, it still seems that there is a big difference between a government asking for the advice of godly church leaders and a government assuming that they have a right to such advice. There is a difference, too, between informally seeking counsel from the church, and seeking to govern the councils of the church.
(Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn)

Although Christ is King of all, there is a very real sense in which he can say that his church, his spiritual kingdom, is not from this world, and that is a fact that the world's leaders need to respect.
(Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn)

For further reading on the differences: https://opc.org/documents/WCF_orig.html

3. The magistrate as protector of the church

“Nursing fathers” a mixed metaphor, from a translation of Isaiah 49:23

Romans 13:1-4, 1 Timothy 2:2

4. The magistrate as protector of religion in general

Did the Philadelphia Assembly intend the magistrate to protect non-Christian religions? “all their people”, “name of religion or of unbelief”, “all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies....”

E. Duties owed to Civil Magistrates

4. It is the duty of people to pray for those in authority, to honor them, to pay them taxes or other revenue, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority for the sake of conscience. Neither unbelief nor difference in religion makes void the just and legal authority of officeholders nor frees the people—church authorities included—from their due obedience to them. Much less does the Pope have any power or jurisdiction over civil authorities in their domains or over any of their people, nor can he deprive them of their domains or lives if he shall judge them to be heretics or on any other pretense whatever.

1. Civil authorities have authority over Christians

Christians’ duty to civil authorities:

- _____ (1 Tim. 2:1-2)
- _____ (1 Pet. 2:17)
- _____ (Rom. 13:6-7)
- _____ (Rom. 13:5, Titus 3:1)

The civil magistrates’ authority is limited: “lawful commands.” Acts 5:29.

2. Religious authorities do not have civil power

F. Application / Discussion

- In light of 1 Cor. 6:1-8, are there situations where believers can take legal action against each other?
- Was the US Revolution justified? When can a lower-level magistrate rebel against a higher magistrate?
- If you are serving on a jury and the law requires you to render an unjust verdict, what can you do?