

Westminster Confession of Faith: Session Twenty-Four

WCF 23 – Of the Civil Magistrate

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. [...]Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:1, 3-4 NKJV).

I. Introduction

II. WCF Chapter XXIII

- a. *Paragraph 1: The Civil Magistrate Ordained by God*
The Existence of Civil Magistrates

The Purpose of Civil Magistrates

Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:14

“Radical Two-Kingdom” Theology
Rev. 1:5, 11:15

- b. *Paragraph 2: Christians as Civil Magistrates*
Duties of a Christian Magistrate

Just War

- c. *Paragraph 3: The Civil Magistrate and the Church*
American Revision (1788) vs. Original WCF (1647)

American Revision (1788)	Original (1647)
<p><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; 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</u></p>	<p><u>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</u></p>

<p>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.</p>	<p>them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.</p>
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d. *Paragraph 4: Duties toward the Civil Magistrate*
Institutional Separation

Magistrate's Authority from His Office, Not the Church

Duties of Christians (Romans 13:7)

Prayer

Honor

Dues

Submission

Helpful Resources

Hodge, Archibald Alexander. *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1869; pp. 398-408.

———. "The Law of the Kingdom." In *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes*, 313–334. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887.

Shaw, Robert. *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2008; pp. 309-324.

Sproul, R. C. *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Revised Edition. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019; pp. 504-524.

Sproul, Jr., R. C. "What Is R2k Theology?" *The Aquila Report*. Last modified September 29, 2013. Accessed October 1, 2022. <https://theaquilareport.com/what-is-r2k-theology/>.

Van Dixhoorn, Chad. *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014; pp. 307-321.