

Article XXXVI The Magistracy (Civil Government)

We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, has appointed kings, princes, and magistrates; willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose He has invested the magistracy with *the sword for the punishment of evil-doers and for the protection of them that do well.*

Their office is not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also to protect the sacred ministry, that the kingdom of Christ may thus be promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by every one, as He commands in His Word.

Moreover, it is the bounden duty of every one, of whatever state, quality, or condition he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God; to supplicate for them in their prayers that God may rule and guide them in all their ways, and *that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity.*

Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God has established among men.

There are three topics that this article covers:

1. Magistrates are appointed by God for his glory, and are a part of his good government over the world – this is a fact, not a statement of how things should be.
 - a. Civil government is necessary because of the sinful nature of man. Gen 9:5-6; Rom. 13: 1-8
 - b. Kings only rule by God's decree; he sets them up and takes them down at his pleasure. Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:35; Isa. 10:12-15
 - c. Even evil rulers are from the hand of God, either as a punishment for sin or for the testing of God's people (Jer. 13:19-27)
2. Magistrates should recognize their duties before God and submit themselves to His hand. Their authority is never sovereign and independent (Deut. 17:14-20)
 - a. Their duty is to promote the welfare and order of civil affairs, that we may live peaceable and quiet lives before God (Isa. 49:25-26; Mic. 3:9-12; Psalm 2; Rev. 14:6-10;
 - i. For examples of godly rulers in the midst of perverse governments, see Joseph and Daniel
 - b. Their second duty is to protect the sacred ministry of the Word of God
3. Everyone has the duty before God to obey the magistrate, regardless of their faithfulness or unfaithfulness in their duties.
 - a. Scripture lists four duties that each of us have towards government
 - i. Pay our taxes cheerfully (Mark 12:17; Rom. 13:6-7)
 - ii. Obey all laws that are not directly contrary to God's commands (Acts 4:17-19; 5:29; Hos. 5:11; Dan. 3:16-18)
 - iii. Pray for the rulers, that God would grant them wisdom and guide their hands (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Heb. 13:17-18)
 - iv. Respect the dignity of government (2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 8, 9)