

The Christian and Civil Government (2nd)

(Today's study continues to examine various Protestant confessions to show not only some differences within them, but to demonstrate an acceptance of modern social issues within the Christian worship.)

In our previous study, we concluded by giving the differences between Protestants and Baptists by quoting from their confessions. We saw that there are not only differences between that of the Baptist and the Reformers, but there are differences between the Protestants in article three. The differences between articles three of the two Protestant confessions were given as such: (1) the Westminster focuses article three around the Church (which according to their "Form of Church-Government" is an umbrella over congregations) whereas the Savoy centers it around the "interest of Christ in the world"; (2) both affirm that civil government is to encourage, promote, protect, and preserve the gospel and professors of the gospel; (3) both affirm that blasphemies, heresies, corruptions, and wicked practices be prevented and that the truth of God be kept pure; (4) the Savoy allows some lead way so as "not disturbing others in their ways or worship that differ from them," whereas the Westminster does not allow such liberty of conscience; and, (5) the Westminster grants that the civil authority has "power to call synods, to be present in them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God," where the Savoy does not allow. This greatly differs from the Baptist confession where article three states "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."

While it is not our intention to produce confusion by supply more quotes, but in order to provide an overall picture of our study, I believe it is important to show a change in some Protestant confessions since the *Westminster Confession of 1647* and the *Savoy Declaration of 1658*.

The *Confession of Faith of The Presbyterian Church in the United States* as ratified by the General Assembly at Augusta, GA, December, 1861, was identical in articles 1, 2, and 4 as the 1647 confession and the 1658 Savoy Declaration. However, Article Three is as follows:

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.

The Presbyterian Church USA confession as printed in 2014 only had one section with two paragraphs regarding "Civil Magistrate." It is as follows:

We confess and acknowledge that empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities are appointed and ordained by God; the powers and authorities in them, emperors in empires, kings in their realms, dukes and princes in their dominions, and magistrates in cities, are ordained by God's holy ordinance for the manifestation of his own glory and for the good and well being of all men. We hold that any men who conspire to rebel or to overturn the civil powers, as duly established, are not merely enemies to humanity but rebels against God's will. Further, we confess and acknowledge that such persons as are set in authority are to be loved, honored, feared, and held in the highest respect, because they are the lieutenants of God, and in their councils God himself doth sit and judge. They are the judges and princes to whom God has given the sword for the praise and defense of good men and the punishment of all open evil doers. Moreover, we state that the preservation and purification of religion is particularly the duty of kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates. They are not only appointed for civil government but also to maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition. This may be seen in David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others highly commended for their zeal in that cause.

Therefore we confess and avow that those who resist the supreme powers, so long as they are acting in their own spheres, are resisting God's ordinance and cannot be held guiltless. We further state that so long as princes and rulers vigilantly fulfill their office, anyone who denies them aid, counsel, or service, denies it to God, who by his lieutenant craves it of them.

Lastly, we shall quote from the *Confession of Faith of 1984* of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The Cumberland Presbyterians are the "New School" Presbyterians from the division of the Presbyterians in and around 1832. While the "Old School" Presbyterians essentially followed historic Calvinism, the "New School" graduated to a more liberal and Arminian theology. Likewise, there was a division of the Baptist into "New School" and "Old School" at this same time in history. The following is from Sections/Paragraphs 6.29, 6.30, 6.31, and 6.32:

Civil government and persons elected to civil office may not assume control over or administration of the church in matters of faith or practice. Yet their duty is to protect the religious freedom of all persons and to guard the right of religious bodies to assemble without interference.

The covenant community, governed by the Lord Christ, opposes, resists, and seeks to change all circumstances of oppression--political, economic, cultural, racial--by which persons are denied the essential dignity God intends for them in the work of creation.

The covenant community affirms the lordship of Christ who sought out the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and the helpless. In her corporate life and through her individual members, the church is an advocate for all victims of violence and all those whom the law or society treats as less than persons for whom Christ died. Such advocacy involves not only opposition to all unjust laws and forms of injustice but even more support for those attitudes and actions which embody the way of Christ, which is to overcome evil with good.

God gives the message and ministry of reconciliation to the church. The church, corporately and through her individual members, seeks to promote reconciliation, love, and justice among all persons, classes, races, and nations.

The purpose for all of these quotes is to not only to illustrate the original distinction between that of the Protestants and the Baptist, but to show the change of the Presbyterians in America in later years with the influence of "social justice" of the more liberal Protestants. The Lord willing, I plan to demonstrate how such social ideologies have invaded the Baptist camps as well. Nevertheless, the concept of civil government having anything to do with the house of God is due to the idea and theology of what is called

“church and state” as established by the Catholics and somewhat adopted by the Protestants at the reformation. However, our premise is that the kingdom of God is not of this world and Caesar has no place in the congregation of the Lord.

We will have to stop for today because our time is up.