

Belgic Confession 36- Civil Government

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There were 3 groups of Christians after the Reformation when the Belgic Confession was written.

The largest and most dominant groups were the Roman Catholics. Roman Catholics saw the civil government as being under the hand of the church. The pope, they argued, had authority over any church, state entity, or king.

Then there were Anabaptists. They generally opted for the removal of all forms of government. They believe they belonged to Christ and therefore they shunned the ways of the world. They ignored the fact Christ made the world and established his law in it. So they ignored the command of the civil government, refused to pay taxes, and would not swear an oath in legal proceedings.

Then there were the Reformers who restored the proper teaching regarding the civil authorities. They taught that God rules the world through kings he appointed. Sadly, the Roman Catholics were suspicious of Reformed Christians. They thought the Reformers taught and believed the same things as the Anabaptists. In fact, the writer of the Belgic Confession was called an Anabaptist.

We will learn today what God taught in his Word concerning civil governments.

Our headings are:

God Established Civil the Government
Man Submits to Civil the Government

Our goals are: **That you will work and pray so civil governments will honor the Lord and they will support the proclamation of the cross by providing safety and stability in the country.**

God Established the 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.

1. God established civil governments.

One of the modern curses the French promoted was the idea of the supremacy of the people,

and that the people have the right and liberty to form the civil government.

You hear terms like “government by the people, for the people.” Something the US developed and hold as heaven’s truth.

But a democracy is wickedness. (This statement is only shocking in modern times!) The government is there from God for God. Democracy is rooted in man’s high view of himself. Man is god in a democracy. What could be wickeder than that?

The reason things aren’t worse here in Canada is because in the past, when most people subscribed to a Judeo-Christian ethic, good laws were generally passed. But now when only a minority subscribe to a Judeo-Christian ethic, you can expect the laws to change to reflect the changing demographic. But look at Jesus’s words of instruction concerning governments!

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Does that sound like civil authority is free to do whatever it wants? Jesus meant all authority is derivative. Look also at Apostle Paul’s warning supporting Jesus’ words.

The state was not autonomous.

Romans 13:1 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.

2. God established civil governments out of love for man.

This means civil governments are for the good of man.

This means man must learn how God wants the civil authorities to be run so civil governments can be run properly.

3. How is God’s love evident to the world in the establishing of civil governments?

God established civil governments to punish and control wickedness and protect the godly.

Punishment not only protected the godly but punishment make the wicked turn to God in repentance.

Romans 13:4 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. 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.

4. When God established civil governments, God did not assume man was inwardly good.

He assumed the inward wickedness of man. He knew people generally did not wish for civil authorities and restrictions because they believed man was naturally good, and would

do good, as encumbrances were removed. It was a nice dream, like John Lennon's 'Imagine,' but it is an unrealistic fantasy. Instead of peace, it resulted in anarchy. Man was an unwitting anarchist.

Libertarians also tended to assume men are more or less Christian in their thinking and they would be better off if left alone. But here is the problem. Following the libertarian logic, a man must be free to smoke marijuana without government interference, even if he drives. If he kills someone...then he will be punished. But when men are wicked and don't care for others, they will have less and less regard for those whom they may injure. And then the person who was killed, would have lost his freedom. One man's total freedom impinged on another person's freedom to live.

So we need civil authorities to keep and balance these freedoms within the limits God set.

5. What are the results of good functioning civil authorities?

a. In punishing the wicked and protecting the godly, civil governments will promote decency and order in society.

b. In punishing the wicked and protecting the godly, God protected the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

God knew when wickedness is controlled, prosperity will more likely happen.

6. Lessons:

a. Ignore those who advocate there be an absolute separation of church and state.

There is one common denominator: Church and state are both under God. Both advance Christ's glory. There is one King over both dominions.

b. Look at what is happening in our country now as God's influence is being removed!

We survived for long, but with a rejection of God, we now are experiencing more anarchy. Soon a parent will go to jail for taking a child overseas for spiritual counseling! We kill the innocent and protect the guilty. The state has run amuck of God's law. God will judge it.

c. You must receive the civil authorities with a good conscience, not just simply as something you tolerate. This is hard, especially in light of what you just heard, but you must ask God for the grace to honor the state. So the next point:

Man Submits to the Civil Government

Moreover, it is the bound 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.

1. All men, regardless of their position in life, ought to submit to the authority of the state.

If a man is rich, he is not exempted from any law. If a man is poor, he is still subject to all of God's laws. Judges were constantly warned not to show favoritism to the rich...or the poor...in the Old Testament. Look at just 1 example.

Leviticus 19:15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.

2. All men, regardless of position in life, ought to pay taxes for the mutual benefit of the people – particularly for the duty of national defense and the execution of justice.

Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Jesus confirmed the need to pay taxes when he paid taxes. **So taxation is not theft.** Excessive or abusive taxation is theft.

3. All men, regardless of position in life, had to honor and respect the civil authorities.

It does not mean you have to like what they do...but you must respect the office they hold.

1Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

4. All men, however, must not obey the state when it forces you to act discordantly with the Word of God.

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

There is a way to remove consistently abusive governments if they become corrupt with the help of lower magistrates. But that is not for individual actions. A lower magistrate may impeach someone who has abused his authority.

5. All men are bound to pray for civil authorities so they might lead well and that there would be peace and progress in the land.

1Timothy 2:1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Keep in mind that the Roman tyrants ruled at this time and they had stinging hands, like at Philippi.

Keep in mind that Guido deBres was persecuted by the Roman Catholic tyrants who controlled civil authorities, even while he said these things. **de Bres' congregation was even forbidden from meeting together on Sunday.** And Philipp II was king of Spain at the time after his father abdicated the throne. He was one of the worst persecutors of God's people...and he had more land under his control than possibly any other man in history.

6. The actions of those who promote things that harmed the civil authorities were to be despised.

a. The promotion of sedition had to be despised. Why? Rebellion is as witchcraft.

b. The Anabaptist's rejection of the authority of judges had to be despised. The Anabaptists believed and taught that the civil judges had no authority over them. They were wrong.

c. The promotion of communism had to be despised. Similar to democracy, is the idea that man, if he pools his resources together, and the government controls the means of production, they could bring a perfect society - utopia.

7. Lessons:

a. It is abominable corrupt that politicians and judges take bribes from the rich and thwart justice.

b. It is abominable that politicians and judges excuse the sins of thieves, abortionists, and arsonists on account of their lives. The civil authorities have no grounds for making excuses for anyone.

c. Ultimately this Article deals with the 5th command. So honor the civil authorities. Don't treat them with contempt. Shine your light as a Christian. Pray for Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Ford.

d. Consider some specific things people do that dishonor the civil government: **Greenpeace.** Some of them have destroyed the livelihood of fishermen. **Black Lives Matter.** They have interrupted business, rioted, and promoted disobedience. **Toronto anti-Poverty group, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and the Occupy Movement**

flaunted government laws and took over public property. Some recently blocked train tracks and harmed many people. Yes, governments must protect people's rights to protest, but they must protect other people's right to life, liberty, and property. **Criminals must be punished.**

Conclusion:

Civil governments are by God and for God. Man needs to **learn how civil authorities ought to function** and **apply that in all areas.** They are to **punish the wicked** and **protect the godly,** especially the church so it can do its God-given duty.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

a. With the state of civil governments today, pray. Pray hard. Pray they might have shame, repent of their wickedness, and return to God.

b. Submit to the civil authorities – even if you don't like their laws (unless they want you to break God's law). Some of that is punishment from God and you must yield to his whipping because of the sins of his church.

c. Work so the Gospel might spread, hearts might be converted, and godly leaders might be raised up again.

Finally: If you reject the authority of God, not only might you face the justice of the civil government, but you will surely face Divine judgment. Your only way of escape from judgment is if you ask God to count Christ's punishment on the cross as your punishment.