

**Christian Nationalism: Part 2**  
**The Christian Faith and Contemporary Challenges**  
**June 20, 2021**

*“My kingdom is not of this world.” – John 18:36*

*“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” – Rom 13:1*

## **I. Review: What is “Christian Nationalism”?**

- A. Definition (for our purposes): The misguided use of Christianity to advance a political cause, particularly by identifying the heavenly Kingdom of Christ with an earthly political vision for America.
1. Does this mean we shouldn’t seek for Christian moral influence in the wider culture? (No.)
  2. Does this mean that we should support a separation between the state and God? (No.)
    - a) **Prov 8:15** – *“By me [i.e., wisdom from God] kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; <sup>16</sup>by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.”*
  3. Does this mean that the political establishment and Christ’s kingdom rise and fall together? (NO!)

## **II. John Calvin on God and Government**

*“He that will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty.” – George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (1855), 450.*

- A. Most basically, our justification in Christ means we are free from all Old Testament ceremonies, man-made church regulations, and even obedience to civil laws for our standing before God.

*“Only let my readers remember this: with whatever obstacles Satan and the world strive to turn us away from God’s commands or delay us from following what he appoints, we must nonetheless vigorously go forward. Then, whatever dangers threaten, we are not free to turn aside even a fingernail’s breadth from this same God’s authority, and it is not lawful under any pretext for us to attempt anything but what he allows.” – John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19.13*

- B. Because civil authorities instituted by God, Christians should obey them (unless they call us to sin).

*“There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority. Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government, human laws, because their consciences have been set free in God’s sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit.” – Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.15*

*“When we hear that a king has been ordained by God, let us at once call to mind those heavenly edicts with regard to honoring and fearing a king; then we shall not hesitate to hold a most wicked tyrant in the place where the Lord has deigned to set him.” – Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.26.*

- C. Although God has ordained civil authorities, the Kingdom of Christ advances through the preaching and teaching of the gospel in the church, to which civil authorities must maintain a particular and limited relationship.

### III. American Revisions to the *WCF* on the Role of the Civil Government Relative to the Church

#### A. *WCF* 20.4 – Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

1. Context: What do we do with people to advance/teach/advertise unbiblical or heretical positions in the church?

Original Text (1646)	American Revision (1788)
<p>“And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or, to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as . . . are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church, <i>and by the power of the civil magistrate.</i>”</p>	<p>“And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or, to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as . . . are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.”</p>

1. Why did WCF say this originally?!
- Historical Reason: The Assembly was called by English Parliament
  - “Biblical” Reason: OT texts that call the king to rule over religion in Israel
    - Ezra 7:26** – “Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.”

## B. WCF 23.3 – Of the Civil Magistrate

- Context: What are the limits and responsibilities of the civil magistrate relative to the church?

Original Text (1646)	American Revision (1788)
<p>“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 them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.”</p>	<p>(Almost completely rewritten) “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; <i>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.</i>”</p>

- Though the magistrate may NOT interfere with church practices and discipline, the civil magistrate IS called to protect the church of Christ, to facilitate the ability of pastors (“ecclesiastical persons”) to fulfill their callings, and to make sure no law hinders the free exercise of the Christian faith, including conducting assemblies undisturbed.

## B. WCF 31.1-2 – Of Synods and Councils

- Context: What is the role of the civil magistrate relative to the church councils?

Original Text (1646)	American Revision (1646)
<p>"1. For the better government, and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils."</p>	<p>"1. For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils: <i>and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for</i></p>

<p>"2. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church, the ministers of Christ of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies."</p>	<p><i>destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church."</i></p> <p>(Original section 2 is omitted; sections 3–5 are renumbered 2–4.)</p>
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1. Only the overseers and rulers of churches may call synods and councils, not the magistrate.
2. We may agree that the state ought not interfere with church's calling, but do we sometimes allow other "self-appointed gurus" or outside church organizations to oversee or take over the church's calling?

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Christ has set you free to obey him as your highest authority (justifying you apart of any works that you do!). But this doesn't mean he doesn't call you to honor the civil authorities in your life.
- B. While Christ has called you to submit to civil authorities, the ungodliness or godliness of those civil authorities does NOT predetermine the "success" of gospel influence in society! (KEY!)
- C. God calls civil rulers to be "nursing fathers" to the church of Jesus Christ, not interfering with church business or Christian practices, but protecting the religious liberty of their subjects and citizens.
- D. Christians should honor the Lord with confidence in every area of life, willing to bear the cross of Christ daily (Luke 9:23!), safe in the care of Christ, and awaiting his glorious return as King.