

#15: Christian Liberty and Relation of Church and State

WCF 20 23

WCF 20: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

1. The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

3. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

4. 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 pretense 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 either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, 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.

1. Considering the topic “Christian liberty”, it is perhaps a great irony that most people today pit “freedom” against religion and even Christianity? Why is that do you think?

2. The above notwithstanding, and about the Christian life especially, the scripture teaches “for *freedom*, Christ has set us *free*” (Gal.4:31). And all of creation is described as yearning to be “set *free* from its bondage” in relation to the work of Christ wherein all of creation is said to “obtain the *freedom* of the glory of the children of God.” (Rom.8:21). What do you think is meant by “Christian freedom?” Is anyone really “absolutely free, or are we just “relatively free?” And if just “relatively free”—then what is *true* freedom?

3. In other words, and contrary to the enlightenment “myth” of absolute freedom, the scripture teach that we are never absolutely free—such that the Christian hope is to be set free *from* one thing in order to serve, be subservient to, or under the power of something else? For instance, in Romans 6:18, we are taught “An having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Notice then, what are the “*froms*” and “*tos*” of Christian freedom according to WCF 20?

- Section 1: *From/To* as further qualified in section 3. (*Titus 2:14, 1Th.1:10, Gal. 1:4, 3:13, Col. 1:13, Rom. 6:14*)

- 1: How does “sin” enslave us? How then does being in submission to Christ set us free?
- 3: What doesn’t this mean—what would be a false application of this sort of Christian freedom—or better- why would it not really be “free” if we return to sinning? (*Gal 5:13, 1 Pet 2:16, 2 Pet 2:19, John 8:34*)

- Section 2: *From/To* as further qualified in section 4. (*Gal 1:10, 2:2:4, James 4:12, Rom 14:4*)
 - 2: How do other people enslave us—both institutionally and perhaps more so, relationally (Notice the title of the book *When People Are Too Big And God Is Too Small*, Edward Welch)
 - 3: What doesn’t this mean—what would be a false application of this sort of Christian freedom? How does the Bible portray the “lawful” exercise of authority—is it a blessing or curse? (Rom 13(e.g. as properly appointed, especially according to apostolic foundation with respect to the church). (

4. What three institutions are not only recognized by God, but are by positive institution ordained by God in scripture such that we are morally responsible to them? And notice especially that to submit unto them is in each case stated freedom “to” as a blessing to us!

- Family (*Notice how Ephesians 5:21 introduces 5:22ff, 6:1-3, 6:5ff, and especially the promises attached*) c.f. WCF 24
- Civil (*Romans 13:1-7, especially vs. 2-4*) c.f. WCF 23
- Ecclesial (*Hebrews 13:7ff, especially vs. 17*) c.f. WCF 21, 25-31

5. Notice then the subsequent chapters of the WCF in relation to these God ordained powers. In Chapter 17 we will review the confessional teachings on these three institutions, and our relation to them, in subsequent studies, But in general terms, in relation to our religion especially, compare section 2 here with section 6 of chapter 1. What do you see in common? How then is God alone the Lord of the conscience?

1:6 The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

1.9 The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

1.10 The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

E.g. James Bannerman has observed from all of this how "man has been made free as to his conscience from the doctrine and commandments of his fellow men, in order that he may be free to serve God."(p. *The Church of God*, p. 160) Under what two circumstances is the conscience free from the doctrines and commandments of men according to section 2?

6. We should carefully note then the teaching of section 4 in relation to the above question. How can we BOTH obey section 2 and section 4 and not, therefore, “upon Christian pretence... oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it... such as to “resist the ordinance of God?” Consider for example the example of Acts 15.

Like the state, the Church is an ordinance of God; and like the state, it is vested by God with a certain measure of authority of its own kind, which entitles it to claim and receive a certain measure of obedience from its members. The Church, for example, has power in matters of faith, not indeed arbitrarily to dictate a new truth or new doctrine of its own, but to declare the doctrine and truth of Christ; and in doing so, to determine and decide for its own purposes upon the faith and profession of its members. Such decisions in regard to controversies of faith, and such declarations of the truth of Christ, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received and submitted to by its members, not only or merely because they are consonant with His Word, but because of the authority by which they are made being an ordinance of God for that end... In other words, there is a certain obligation which Church power carries with it, because its acts and decisions are agreeable to the Word of God; there is a second and additional obligation which Church power carries with it, because it is itself an ordinance of God, appointed expressly for such ends.” (p. 237) James Bannerman c.f. WCF 31.3

7. Notice that of special interest is the subject is the question of faith and worship. What duty is implied in the exercise of power by the church regarding what is said and done in Covenantal worship as ordained by God? Notice carefully the principle in section 2 *Which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.* This principle has been historically described as the “regulative principle?”

- Notice then how the “regulative principle” is a necessary extension of the teachings concerning Christian freedom and liberty of Conscience.”

8. Observe how the confession follows “Christian Liberty” (#20) with Chapter 21 Of Religious Worship, Chapter 22, “Of Lawful Oaths” and Chapter 23, “Of the Civil Magistrate.” Why do you think that is? (We will return to Chapter 21 and 22 later, but will now move to Chapter 23).

9. Consider the teaching of Romans 14. How does this relate to the question of Christian liberty with respect to our duty to “welcome one another” within the communion of Christ, albeit those who are of a different conscience than us about various ethical matters.

- Note especially how this passage has often been misunderstood—as to reverse even the real exercise of Christian liberty with respect to the command to welcome one another.
 - E.g what exactly is Paul talking about possibly being destroyed in terms of the work of God for he sake of food (notice carefully 20-21, in relation to the point of Romans “no distinction...” and 14:1-3 in terms of *Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat...etc*) E.g. The point of this passage is the proper exercise of Christian freedom such as not to destroy Christian unity in the body of Christ—it is NOT that some Christians are to stop doing certain things lest other “weak” Christians be tempted to do what according to Paul is a “weak” or immature application of the Bible anyway—rather it is for the weak and the strong (Paul’s terms) to NOT break fellowship over such things as are not the essence of Christian union! E.g. it is a warning against unnecessary church schism!
- How then ought this to impact what the church requires as “terms” of Christian union and fellowship together around Christ’s table so that on the one hand people are enabled to grow within a process that reflects this doctrine of freedom of conscience, albeit in a way that also recognizes that some things are “strong” vs. ‘weak” in terms of belief and practice?

"The power of the Church has for its aim and end directly the general benefit and spiritual good of the Church as a body.... such power is instituted for the interests and spiritual edification of the whole Church and not for the advantage of the few who administer it... the spiritual edification of the whole body of believers is the one end and aim of Church power." (p. 252, 254) 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:24-26

10. Some concrete example to consider:

- Civil: Can a Christian drive 80 in Nebraska, or wade in a mountain stream with the sign "no wading."?
- Church: The question of the use of certain media (drama, video clips, etc) in worship?
- The question of what it means to keep the Sabbath Holy? (go out to eat, go to a game, Sunday School?, etc)
- The question of how to spend church money—e.g. should the church, acting jointly vis-à-vis its Sunday collection, support the YMCA, the local soup kitchen, etc?
- Should the church engage politics (if so when) and should the church endorse certain political candidates?

WCF 23: Church and State

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers.

2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the new testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.

3. 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.

4. It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience' sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less hath the pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretense whatsoever.

1. Meredith Kline has argued that the *institutional* separation of church from state from out of their original context of both being expressed within the family, was in the institution of *common grace* given to Cain in Genesis 4:11-17. Kline summarized it this way:

Common grace was introduced to act as a rein to hold in check the curse on mankind and to make possible an interim historical environment as the theater for a program of redemption.

Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*.

2. Likewise, the 18th century Presbyterian, Samuel Davies, described the Biblical institution of church and state from out of the family this way:

The great Author of our nature, who has made us sociable creatures, has instituted various societies among mankind, both civil and religious, and joined them together by the various bonds of relation. The first and radical society is that of a family, which is the nursery of the church and state. This was the society instituted in Paradise in the state of innocence, when the indulgent Creator, finding that it was not good for a man, a sociable creature, to be alone, formed a helpmeet for him and united them in the

endearing bonds of the conjugal relations. From thence, the human race was propagated; and when multiplied, it was formed into civil governments and ecclesiastical assemblies...

3. The classic New Testament passage of civil institution is found in Romans 13:1-7. What in general, can we observe about the extent and limits of the state according to Romans 13?

4. How does WCF 23 compare to Romans 13? Notice section 3.. What especially is the civil institution of “state” supposed to do , not do? (E.g section 1 and 3)

5. One of the important documents of the reformed tradition is George Gillespie’s famous *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* presented before the Westminster General Assembly of 1647. As influenced by this document, Thomas Peck, also provides a good summary of the relation of “church” to “state” from his *Notes on Ecclesiology*:

1. In relation to God: *the state is an ordinance of God considered as the creator, and, therefore, the moral governor of mankind, while the church is an ordinance of God considered as the saviour and restorer of mankind. The state is ordained for man as man; the church for man as a sinner in a condition of inchoate restoration and salvation. The state is for the whole race of man; the church consists of that portion of the race which is really, or by credible profession, the mediatorial body of Christ. (275)*

2. In relation to constitution: *The next point of difference between church and state is in the rules by which they are to be respectively regulated in the exercise of their functions. The rule of the church is the word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is the statute book of the visible kingdom of Christ. The rule for the state is the “light of nature,” or the human reason.*

3. In relation to power: *The power of the church is, strictly and only, “ministerial and declarative”; the power of the state is magisterial and imperative. The church has no power to make laws, but only to declare the law of God. All her acts of government are acts of obedience to her Head and King. The state has the power to make laws as well as to declare them; has a legislative as well as a judicial power.*

4. In relation to Form: *Hence, the form of government for the church, the regulative and the constitutive principles of her organization, are not matters to be determined by human reason, but to be derived from the Bible as the constitution and statute-book: while, in the state, these are matters to be settled by the history and condition of political communities. The life of the state is natural, and it is left to assume an organization for itself. The life of the church is supernatural, and God prescribes an organization for it. (281)*

5. In relation to sanctions: *church and the state differ in their sanctions, as well as in their authority and their rule. The sanction of ecclesiastical government is moral, appealing to the faith and the conscience, a parental discipline, designed for the good of the offender. Its symbol is the “keys.” The sanction of civil government is force, appealing to the bodily sensibilities of the subject or the citizen; a penal administration, designed to vindicate the majesty of justice and the supremacy of law, with a very incidental, if any, reference to the good of the transgressor. Its symbol is the “sword.” (287)*

6. In relation to scope of power: *“The scope and aim of civil power is only things temporal; of the ecclesiastical power, only things spiritual. Religious is a term not predicable of acts of the state; political and civil, not predicable of acts of the church.”*

6. With respect to the Christian’s relation to the state, notice carefully section 2. The Confession therefore advocates a position often described as “just war theory,,” and related to this, the recognition that Christians

together with people of other faiths and none, can be called by God to work within the state toward the execution of civil ends (e.g. police, soldiers, magistrates, etc) This position is different from the classic Ana-Baptist position, sometimes referred to as “Christian pacifism.” What, is at the heart of the issue? E.g. Is there a “separation of church and state?” And is this different from a separation of Christian and State? (Thus the importance of having a clear “institutional” theology, not to be confused with a theology of individuals.)

7. What is the duty of the Christian to the state? (section 4) Notice especially that our duty to the state is irrespective of the persons themselves, and especially their spirituality vis-à-vis those who hold office in the state. Where do we see an example of this in scripture (Lk.20:25)? Notice also Larger Catechism # 127-128. C.f. WCF 20.4 (Discuss some possible issues—tax? Revolution, and if so, under what conditions? Blue laws? Passive resistance? (c.f. addendum by T. David Gordon)

8. Notice then chapter 31, section 4 and what has been described as the spirituality of the church. As we have discussed in the relation of *state* to church, what is the relation of *church* to state. E.g. what constraints ought the church demonstrate given its institutional charter from Christ? What are the dangers of the church that doesn't regulate itself in its scope and aim in terms of proclamations and actions?

"History establishes no truth more clearly than this, that when the Church has engaged in any manner in political difficulties, its best interests, its influence for good, and its religious character have suffered. Individual members of the Church have their responsibilities as citizens and as politicians and their duties are of a totally different sort from those of the Church collectively. Their religion should, indeed make them better citizens; but their citizenship in this world is one thing, and their citizenship of the great Church is another thing. The Church, as such, has absolutely no concern with those works in which it is the highest worldly duty of the man to engage. The church owes no allegiance to any earthly power; it owes no fealty to any monarch or government. For there is no divided loyalty in the church, and no part of the Church, in Jerusalem or Antioch, in England or America, on earth or in heaven, that owes any allegiance which all the other parts do not equally owe. The mistake of confounding the duty of the individual citizen and church-member, with the duties of the church, has led to the most fatal errors.

Stuart Robinson, May 22, 1862

9. Regarding the so called “spirituality” doctrine of the church, it could be shown that a non-pacifist, albeit “sectarian” doctrine of the church (by this I mean sectarian in relation to state) has its reformed roots in Augustine, Calvin, Scottish Reformation, 18th century Virginia Presbyterians, 19th Century Border State Presbyterians, the German Barmen Movement, and even reformed aspects of the post-liberal movement today. But this is for another day perhaps? But given this emphasis—wherein the actions of individuals is distinguished from the actions of the church acting corporately in its declarations and activities—how would this impact the meaning of “Christian ethics.” E.g. How should the church relate to poverty, politics, war, etc.? When has the church said/done too little, too much? What would it mean for the “church to be the church” and for this to be its ethical contribution to society? What does it mean that Christian ethics is necessarily ecclesial ethics?

10. Consider for instance, the perspective of Howard Yoder, who many would affirm as the father of post-liberal ethical theory. In his influential work, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), John Howard Yoder re-examined the slogan of the 1948 Amsterdam Assembly “let the church be the church.” More specifically, Yoder was arguing for the “centrality of the church” as a “social strategy.” According to Yoder, to the degree that the church becomes a “restored society,” it does so as an authentic witness in the greater society.

The church must be a sample of the kind of humanity which, for example, economic and racial differences are surmounted. Only then will it have anything to say to the society that surrounds it about how those difference must be dealt with.¹

¹ Yoder, John Howard, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2^d Edition (Eerdmans: Grand Rabids, Michigan, (1972), p. 150-152.

Addendum: Duties of the Fifth Commandment: State

T. David Gordon

I. The institution of civil government

A. The Scripture

1. Genesis 9: 6 “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.”

2. Romans 13:1 “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing.”

B. The Westminster Confession, 23:1

1. “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.”

II. The mandate of civil government-- to mediate the common grace of God for the common good.

A. The maintenance of justice: punishing the wicked and exonerating the righteous.

B. The well-being of its citizens

III. The authority of civil government

A. To punish: Gen. 9:5-6; Rom. 13:1-7

B. To tax: Mat. 22:21

C. To wage just war: (Gen.9:5-6, Rom.13:1-7)

Acts 10:1 “In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. 2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.”

Lk. 3:9-14: “‘Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He

said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'"

IV. The limits of civil government

A. May not intrude upon other institutions ordained by God.

Mt. 22:21 "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

B. May not bind the conscience (Nebuchadnezzar had no proper authority over the conscience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego).

C. May not destroy those rights which are inherent and natural, namely, the right to obey God (the only right which, by nature, as made in God's image, we have).

V. The citizen's responsibility to civil government

A. Scripture

1. To obey all laws that do not require sin *per se*.
2. To suffer the penalty of passive resistance to unjust government.

Acts 4:19 "But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;"

Acts 5:29 "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

3. To labor, insofar as one is capable under the state's authority to see the state fulfil its purpose.
4. To revolt only when the government persistently fails to execute justice and to promote the well-being of its citizens, and when the revolution will probably promote a government more likely to execute justice and promote the citizens' well-being. (Note the difference between "passive resistance" and what amounts to "private revolt.")
 - a. Justification of revolution. Note that the duty to obey the magistrate in Rom. 13:2-4 is based upon three realities: that the magistrate is "what God has appointed" that the magistrate is "not a terror to good conduct, but to bad", and "is God's servant for your good." Thus, when the civil magistrate does not function as God has appointed it to function; or is a terror *not* to bad conduct, but to good; or when the civil magistrate is *not* a servant of God for the good of the people, the biblical *ground* for submission is gone.
 - b. Whether revolution is a private right. The orthodox tradition has always held that the right of revolution is not individual, but corporate. An individual act of revolt is in fact treasonous. The magistrate's duty to serve "for good" is a corporate duty; the magistrate must serve the people as a whole for good. What is good for the whole may often be troublesome to individuals, yet this does not justify revolt. E.g., eminent domain laws are essential to the establishing of efficient transportation routes and emergency routes, even though they may be inconvenient to those most directly effected by them. Similarly, the power to conscript into military service is more

inconvenient for those subject to such conscription than to others; yet it is for the common “good” that such is done.

In almost all circumstances, revolt is wicked if done merely for ideological reasons (the preference of one *form* of government over another), since any *form* of government is *capable* of serving the people for their good, and any *form* of government is capable of disserving the people. Example: We prize democracy, and some are apparently zealous enough about it to consider revolt solely on the ground of establishing a democracy. Yet, what is a democracy, but the right to choose governors? And what have we a right to *require* of our governors, other than what God requires of them (to execute justice, and serve our good)? Thus, if a dictator executed justice and served the good of the people, it would be wicked to revolt, in order to *choose* someone to do what is already done. That is, the scripture defines the *purpose* of government, not the *method* of government. Thus, while we may properly debate the question of the relative merits of various methods of government, we may not revolt merely on that ground. Churchill’s comment in the House of Commons (11/11/47) may be apropos: “Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” More cynical, while containing an element of truth, was Dr. Samuel Johnson’s observation: “I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual.”

c. When, if ever, revolution is prudent. If, in overthrowing a government, evil conduct is increased (because there is no governor to suppress it), then the *result* of revolt is worse than the *ground* of revolt. If revolt does not result in “your good,” corporately considered, then the result was worse than the cause. Here it would be well to consider Bosnia-Herzegovina, and R. L. Dabney’s wise comment that: “a harsh and unjust government is a far less evil than the absence of all government”.

B. The Westminster Standards

1. WCF. 23:4 “It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their

persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience’ sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates’ just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less hath the pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretense whatsoever.”

2. WCF 20:4 “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 pretense 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.”