

## THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE'S DUTY

### The Scriptural Testimony

The civil magistrate should suppress false religion and encourage true religion. Scottish Presbyterian Theologian David Dickson explains why in these words from his *Truth's Victory Over Error*:

“First, because it is foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, that in the days of the gospel, kings shall be nursing fathers and queens nursing mothers to the church of God, chap. 49.23.

Second, because Artaxerxes, who was but a heathen king, was very careful to make a decree, that whatsoever was commanded by the God of heaven, should be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven. And whosoever would not obey the law of God and the king, judgment was to be executed speedily upon him, whether by death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment. For which singular mercy, Ezra blessed the Lord God of his fathers, who had put such a thing in the king's heart, chap. 7.23, 25-28. So did Nebuchadnezzar make a decree, that if any people, nation or language should speak anything amiss against the God of heaven, they should be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dunghill, Dan. 3.29. The like we read of Darius, whom made a decree that all men should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, chap. 6.26.

Third, from the example of Hezekiah, who removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent, to which the Israelites did burn incense, 2 Kings 18.4.

Fourth, from the example of Josiah, who made a thorough reformation; and made all Israel to serve the Lord their God. The word in the original impoeth, that he in a manner force and compelled them to the pure worship and service of God, as a servant is forced and compelled to his work. He, by his royal power and authority, kept them in order, forbidding idolatry, and commanding them to serve God no otherwise than according to his Word, 2 Chron. 34.33 and 15. 12-13. They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul: that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.

Fifth, because whoever blasphemed the Name of the Lord was surely put to death, Lev. 24.16. This blaspheming was a piercing through or stabbing the Name of the Lord, as the original word properly signifies, which may be done not only after this manner, but by maintaining blasphemous errors and heresies.

Sixth, because the supreme magistrate is *custos utriusque tabulae*, a keeper of both tables of the Law of God: as well of the first table, which relates to religion, and our duty to God; as of the second, which relates to righteousness, and our duty to our neighbor. If then he may punish evil doers who offend against the second table, and force and compel them to obedience by the sword of justice, which God hath put into his hand, much more may he punish idolaters and blasphemers, who offend against the first table, and force and compel them to obedience, seeing there are many sins against the first table which are more heinous and odious than the sins against the second table. And though it be the sinful practice of the church of Rome to force men and women to be of their religion, which is superstitious and idolatrous, yet it is not so to others who have the true religion among them. And though our blessed Savior, and his Apostles did not use such means for propagating the Gospel, reserving the glory of conquering of souls to himself, and the power of his Spirit, yet has taught nothing to the contrary, but that kings and magistrates whom he has made nursing Fathers to his church, may, according to the laudable examples of the good kings of Judah, improve their power for reformation, and maintenance of his own religion."

## Confessional Attestation

The historic reformed confessions agree as to this duty. Here are excerpts from three reformed standards:

“THE DUTY OF THE MAGISTRATE. The chief duty of the magistrate is to secured and preserve peace and public tranquillity. Doubtless he will never do this more successfully than when he is truly God-fearing and religious; that is to say, when, according to the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, he promotes the preaching of the truth and sincere faith, roots out lies and all superstition, together with all impiety and idolatry, and defends the Church of God. We certainly teach that the care of religion belongs especially to the holy magistrate.” – The Second Helvetic Confession

“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 evildoers, and for the protection of them that do well. And their office is, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honoured and worshipped by every one, as he commands in his Word. Moreover, it is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honour 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 quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” – Belgic Confession

“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; yet he has 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, administrated, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he has 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.” – Westminster Confession

## Conclusion

Civil government at every level – local, state, and federal - should “kiss the Son” and uphold God’s moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments.

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This tract is published and distributed by the Reformation Party ( [www.reformationparty.org](http://www.reformationparty.org) ) to encourage explicitly reformed Christian politics so that civil governments “kiss the Son” by upholding God’s moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments. Such Reformation Party Tracts are available for free print out and distribution from [www.reformationparty.org/tracts/](http://www.reformationparty.org/tracts/).