

## **Lecture 24- Civil Government**

### **Prayer**

*Grant, Almighty God, since we have already entered in hope upon the threshold of our eternal inheritance and know that there is a mansion for us in heaven since Christ our head, and the first fruits of our salvation, has been received there; grant that we may proceed more and more in the way of Your holy calling until at length we reach the goal and so enjoy the eternal glory of which You have given us a taste in this world by the same Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **Civil Government**

#### I. Calvin's Treatment of Civil Government

##### A. History

1. Institutes
2. Anabaptist issues
3. *The Prince* by Machiavelli
4. Commentaries

##### B. Division of 4, 20

1. 4, 20, 1-3: Function and responsibility of civil government
2. 4, 20, 4-13: Work of magistrate
3. 4, 20, 14-16: Character of civil law
4. 4, 20, 17-32: Response of governed people

#### II. "Two-Fold Government"

##### A. Church

##### B. State

##### 1. God's instrument

- a. "Another help" on our pilgrimage (4, 20, 2)
- b. "Civil authority is a calling..." (4, 20, 4) God's "vice regents (4, 20, 4):  
"vicars of God" (4, 20, 6)

##### 2. Reasons for civil government

- a. Fact of sin
- b. God's goodness
- c. Preservation and blessing of humanity

##### 3. Function of civil government

- a. Second table of the law (4, 20, 9; 4, 20, 2; 4, 20, 3)
- b. First table of the law (4, 20, 9; 4, 20, 2; 4, 20, 4)

##### 4. Types of government

- a. We must accept the form of government God has appointed for us
- b. Calvin prefers "aristocracy, or aristocracy tempered by democracy" (4, 20, 8)
  - 1) Not hereditary ruling class
  - 2) Safety in numbers

##### 5. Exercise of force

- a. Must avoid excessive severity
- b. Must avoid "cruellest gentleness"
- c. Right to wage war (4, 20, 11)

##### 6. Right to tax legitimately

##### C. Laws that should govern a state

1. Not by Old Testament laws, but by principles of love and equity
2. Lawsuits permissible

#### III. Relation Between Church and State

- A. Distinction, not separation
    - 1. The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate..." (4, 11, 3)
    - 2. "...Nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church" (4, 11, 3)
  - B. Co-operation - "Their function ought to be so joined that each serves to help, not hinder, the other" (4, 11, 3)
- IV. Civil Disobedience
- A. Scripture commands obedience to rulers
    - 1. 4, 20, 7 and 4, 20, 23
    - 2. Wicked rulers
      - a. Patience (4, 20, 25)
      - b. Prayer (4, 20, 29)
  - B. "Open avengers" (4, 20, 30)
    - 1. "Armed from heaven" to punish wicked rulers
    - 2. Not a program for revolution but acknowledgement that God directs the overthrow of governments
  - C. "Magistrates of the people" (4, 20, 30)
    - 1. Historic, constitutional function
    - 2. Not an incitement for people to revolt but an appeal to the magistracy to fulfill its legitimate function
  - D. But we must obey God rather than men
    - 1. Piety is our goal

**For Further Study**

McNeill, John T. ed. *On God and Political Duty*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.

A collection of Calvin's writings on political duty (passages from the *Institutes* and Calvin's *Commentaries* on Romans and Daniel) with a valuable introduction by McNeill.