

## **Civil Government**

As we have in each lesson, let us pray a prayer from John Calvin.

*“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.”*

Calvin ends the *Institutes*, as you know, with a chapter on civil government. You might think that an appropriate place to end would have been his chapter on eschatology, which is the end of Book II. Calvin goes on to Book IV with his treatment of the church, the sacraments, and civil government. This is another indication of the practicality of Calvin's treatment. He encourages us to look forward to heaven in the last chapter of Book III as well as in chapter 9, “Meditation on the Future Life.” As long as we live in this world, until we go to heaven, we have responsibilities and duties here. It seems that it is not inappropriate for Calvin to end his great work on Christian theology with a powerful chapter on civil government. Not everyone has seen it that way, though. Bondell, in his survey of Calvin's theology, rearranges Calvin's treatment in Book IV. Bondell deals with civil government earlier and then he is able to end on the high note of the Lord's Supper rather than plunging back down into the nitty gritty life of living in this world. I like Calvin's way of doing it, though. It gets us back into the world and the church. Christians are citizens of both realms. Civil government is a topic of significant interest to Calvin, as it was to Zwingli. It was less significant to Luther. Calvin has great concern about this topic, and he deals with it in the *Institutes*. In Book III, chapter 19, where he talks about Christian liberty, he wants to make sure that that is not to be understood as liberty from the state or government. Some radicals were interpreting it that way as it came from Luther. Calvin returns to the idea and topic of civil government in chapter 20 of Book IV. In your thinking, you need to link Book III, chapter 19 with Book IV, chapter 20. This is because Book IV, chapter 20 is a continuation of Book III, chapter 19.

We have not done too much with the superscriptions that appear in the paragraphs of the *Institutes*. Perhaps from reading the introductory material, you know that is the way the editor tries to indicate the source of each of these paragraphs or sentences. It begins in 1536 for a, 1539 for b, and on up to 1559. It is interesting to look at those occasionally. As we do that in chapter 20, “Civil Government,” we will see that almost all of this comes from 1536. Calvin does not rewrite, but rather he brings together what he has written and expands and develops. He adds some material to what he has done earlier, but so much of his treatment of civil government is from 1536 with some additions in 1539. There were a few additions from the later period.

The date 1536 was also the date of the Muenster Episode, when the Anabaptists took over the city of Muenster. They created an Old Testament theocracy, which was finally defeated by an army of Roman Catholics and Protestants. Muenster became a symbol of radical Reformation attitudes. This caused a lot of fear and concern that whatever the Protestant movement would spread it would cause the overthrow of civil governments. That is one of the reasons Calvin was concerned in 1536 to think about civil government from a Christian point of view and a Protestant point of view. Also, by 1536, Machiavelli's *The Prince* had been published with its undue reverence for kings. That book would have been in Calvin's mind as he wrote this chapter. In 1421, Calvin talked about “the flatterers of princes immoderately praising their power, these princes who do not hesitate to set themselves against the rule of God Himself.” That is the critique of the immoderate praise of princes as it occurred in Machiavelli's

*The Prince*, which was first written in Italian and later translated into Latin. With all of that in the background, as early as 1536, Calvin was concerned about these matters. Calvin also treats civil government in his commentaries. As you would expect, the place where this appears most thoroughly is in his commentaries on Daniel and Romans. John T. McNeill, the editor of our 1959 edition of the *Institutes*, also edited a little book called *On God and Political Duty*. In it he brings together these sources of Calvin's treatment of civil government. There are two chapters in the *Institutes* and passages from Daniel and Romans. He includes with that a very helpful introduction to Calvin and his views of civil government.

Book IV, chapter 20 can be divided up in the following way: sections 1 through 3 deal with the function and responsibility of civil government, sections 4 through 13 deal with the work of the magistrate, sections 14 through 16 deal with the character of the civil law, and sections 17 through 32 deal with the response of the governed people. We will work through those different ideas as we seek to understand what Calvin means to set forth on this topic.

In his commentaries, in Book III, chapter 19, and here, Calvin often talks about a twofold government. Christians are under a twofold government. One is the government of the church, which he already dealt with extensively in Book IV. Calvin says that government pertains to spiritual life, which leads to eternal life. Christians are also under a second government, which is the civil government or the government of the state. According to Calvin, this pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality. It does not pertain to spiritual things (doctrine or sacraments) but to outward community living. For Calvin, civil government is not an inconsequential thing. Civil government is God's instrument and gift to us. Calvin has a very positive view of government; it is not a negative view just to keep law and order. In Calvin's view, civil government is a positive blessing. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 2, he says, "it is another help on our pilgrimage." Not only do we have the external means applied to the church and the sacraments but also to the civil government. It is not something we merely tolerate; it is something we thank God for because it is a help to us as Christians and citizens. Remember that Book IV deals with the external means. Book III is about the Christian believer, all the way from faith to heaven.

The Christian believer, Calvin insists in Book IV, cannot be separated from the church. Our life is a life that is both internal and external. The church cannot be detached from the larger life of humanity as a whole. The church is part of life on this earth. We cannot take the believer out of the church and have a spiritual person without the community experience of the church. Neither can we take the church out of the world and have it somehow isolated and standing all by itself.

I have written a number of local church histories. One of them is about First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina. Another is about Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. It will be 250 years old in 2005. I am now working on the First Presbyterian Church in Augusta, Georgia. It was 200 years old in 2004. Every time I work on one of these church histories, I am impressed with this. I cannot write the history of the church in a vacuum. It involves the history of the city, the state, the people that surround it and the culture of that place. Calvin makes this clear in his treatment of civil government. The church is in the state. The church is in the world. In one sense it is not of the world, but in another sense it is very much in the world.

For Calvin, both church and state are God's means of establishing His order in this world, restraining evil, and blessing those who do good. This is quite in contrast to some people in the sixteenth century, namely the Anabaptists and some of the radicals. This means for Calvin that civil authority or leadership

in the state is a calling. Calvin says in Book IV, chapter 20, section IV that to be a magistrate or officer of the state is “Not only holy and lawful before God but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men.” If I just read that to you without putting it in context and asked you what Calvin was talking about, you would probably say he was talking about the pastor or minister. Almost shockingly, he is talking about civil leaders. He calls them “vice regents” in Book IV, chapter 20, section 4, and he calls them “vicars of God, deputies of God” in Book IV, chapter 20, section 6. Calvin uses some extravagant language to talk about the role of civil leaders.

Let us talk about Calvin’s view of the reasons for civil government. Why do we have it, and why does God give us civil government? Calvin begins with the fact of sin. That is not the primary thought in Calvin, but it is a part of his understanding of the reason for civil government. Because of sin there needs to be constraint, order, and government. Calvin begins with that or at least includes that in his reasons for civil government. It is almost the primary thought in Luther: government is there because of sinfulness. I do not think it is the primary thought in Calvin. Government is there because of the providence of God, though sinfulness enters in. As we discuss in a moment the types of government, Calvin prefers a government in which authority is spread out. He does not like it to be concentrated in one person or even a few people because of sinfulness. Because of human sin, one person who has all the power can abuse that power so easily.

The fact of sin is one reason, but a stronger reason in Calvin’s view is God’s goodness and providence. He has given us government, which is a positive good. Book IV, chapter 20, section 2 says government is “not a polluted thing with which Christians will have nothing to do.” That is a criticism of the Anabaptists, many of whom were saying civil government is evil. They would not have anything to do with it. Calvin says civil government is a gift of God and a positive good. Christians should be involved in it.

Calvin says a third reason for civil government is for the preservation and blessing of humanity. It is to control sin, to keep sinful power from being concentrated in a few people who can abuse it, and also because of God’s goodness. Part of God’s goodness is that He uses civil government to preserve and bless humanity. Without it there is anarchy, destruction, and all kinds of evil. We have seen that in recent times after the war in Iraq when there was almost no government there. There is beginning to be a government there again. At first it looked like it was worse to have no government than to have an evil government, which at least imposed a certain amount of law and order with a lot of injustice. You can see the evils that come when there is no government. Calvin would not be anti-government, just looking at a necessary evil. For him it is a positive good.

Let us talk about the twofold function of civil government. Calvin relates it to the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. He looks first at the second table of the Law, which relates to the commandments that speak of our life in society. Thou shall not steal, kill, or commit adultery. Calvin says civil government is there to enforce and encourage obedience to these precepts of God. He says, “It adjusts our life to society, it forms our social behavior to civil righteousness, it reconciles us with one another, it promotes general peace and tranquility that humanity be maintained among men.” Civil government has to do with all these social relations. It has to do with these areas of connection between persons, to regulate our lives, and to promote peace and tranquility on this earth. Calvin does not stop there, though. He goes on to apply the role of civil government to the first table of the Law as well.

This is where we live in a quite different world from the sixteenth century. We need to understand both Calvin’s thinking on it and the reason we do not follow Calvin in this. Calvin believed that the civil

government, just as it had the function of preventing people from stealing from one another, also had the function of promoting “the true religion.” By this he meant the Christian religion and the Protestant religion. Calvin says, “Civil government protects the outward worship of God.” By that he meant that civil government should not regulate the inner workings of the church. The civil government cannot dictate doctrine, control worship, or practice church discipline. Calvin had to fight long and hard to win for the church the sole right to exercise church discipline. One of the reasons he had to leave Geneva in 1538 was because he could not win that point. Calvin could not stay in Geneva when church discipline was not in the hands of the church but in the hands of the state. Even when he came back, he was not able for another decade to actually free the church from state interference in the matter of church discipline. Calvin was not trying to separate church and state. He felt that the church had the right to regulate its own affairs but that “the state should work with the church in promoting the church, in preventing opposition from forming the church, and in defending piety and the church that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians.” This meant in Geneva, and it was true almost everywhere else in the sixteenth century, that there was no separation of church and state. Calvin agreed with this, though some of the Anabaptists had different views. It would not be until much later in places like Rhode Island in the American colonies that a true separation of church and state would take place.

With Calvin's view of the role of the state to enforce, defend, and promote both tables of the Law, this meant that heresy was a civil crime punishable by the state. A famous example of that is Servetus. He was not put to death by the church in Geneva but by the state. Calvin agreed, and he wrote the other Reformers for advice. All of the Reformers agreed that heresy was a civil crime. Calvin tried to have the sentence mitigated from burning to beheading, which might not sound like much, but if we were facing one or the other, we would make a quick choice to which way we would rather die. Beheading was a much swifter and more merciful form of capital punishment than burning, which was excruciating. Calvin was not able to persuade the state, which had the last word in this. Servetus went to the stake and died there by fire. With the view that Calvin and almost everybody else held that heresy was a civil crime, heresy was tantamount to rebellion. In a sixteenth-century context, heresy was not only just getting an idea wrong about doctrine, but because of union of church and state and the fact that each state had one church, whether it was Reformed, Lutheran or Catholic, it was something like rebellion or treason would be today. We could easily separate heresy from treason today, but in the sixteenth century it was not easy to do that. Heresy looked like treason, and treason often was linked with heresy. We get something of an idea as to why sixteenth-century people on all sides insisted that heresy was a crime.

Calvin does not identify church and state; the two are distinct. The church is the church, and the state is the state. There is not a single government, but there is a twofold government. There is not a theocracy like in the Old Testament. We can see Calvin's struggle to keep the two separate when he insists that the church has the right of church discipline. The state cannot interfere with that. With his concern to distinguish the two, he does not want to separate the two. He does not want to secularize the state. The state is still a Christian state and has responsibilities toward the church. Calvin makes a distinction between church and state. The church has its roles of doctrine, worship, and discipline. Later those are the three marks of the church. For Calvin, the two marks of the church are the pure preaching of the Word and the sacraments rightly administered. Discipline is closely connected although not a third mark. The state has its role, and the church cannot dictate to the state what laws to pass and how to manage its affairs.

With the word “distinction” we also need the word “cooperation.” There is not a separation. The church and state are in the same business: to work together to promote life on earth, true piety, and the truth religion. It works out in Geneva that there is a line of distinction, but it is not clear. The church moves over into the territory of the state when it urges the passing of certain laws and the enforcement of those

laws. The state moves over into the territory of the church when it interferes with doctrine, worship, and discipline, as it did in Geneva. The line is not a clear, firm separation of church and state. There is distinction, but there are other lines that can vary, depending on what is going on.

Calvin wanted to push the state line back to the center and say that certain things belonged to the church only. There were plenty of people in Geneva who felt that the church should have greater control over the laws of the state, not just in suggesting those laws, but in actually forming and enforcing them. Calvin preferred the frequency of the Lord's Supper to be every week, but the civil government said you could only do it once a month. Later they said you could only do it once every three months. That was a place that the civil government was dictating to the church in an area of worship. I do not know that there was ever a time when the civil government in Geneva tried to establish doctrine for the Genevan church. The civil government often got involved in doctrinal issues, for instance the matter of Servetus. He was tried and condemned by the civil government on the charge of anti-trinitarianism. The civil government had interest in that and became involved in it. As far as I know, it never tried to dictate to Calvin or the ministers how to settle an issue of doctrine.

Let us now look at types of government. Calvin says there are different ways in which states can be governed. His thought is that you should accept however you are being governed and not be too concerned about it. "We must accept the form of government the Lord has appointed for us and not attempt to change it." He thinks it is an idle pastime for private citizens to debate the pros and cons of various types of government. You can imagine how Calvin would feel if he were alive today and could read the newspaper. He would see all the letters, editorials, and debate that go on about how we run our country and what is wrong with it. I think it would be astounding to him. I am not saying that we should not have that debate. I am just stating that, for Calvin in his time, he was concerned that people accept what God had placed over them in His providence.

Even though he says not to talk about it, debate it, or get so upset about it, he offers some suggestions as to various types of government. Calvin clearly prefers a government in which citizens share some responsibility. He has a growing revulsion toward the kingship itself, according to McNeill. We can see this in his persistent and often sweeping denunciation of kings. It goes all the way back to his letter to Francis I in 1535. Calvin is very respectful of Francis, who is the king. He does not want to create any rebellion. He is so concerned in the 1535 letter to say that they were not Anabaptists. They were not trying to change the government or overthrow anything. They were good citizens and respectful of the king. But Calvin does not hesitate to subject the king to biblical criticism. He says that the king stands under the Bible and is not free to do anything that he chooses. Even though Calvin does not reject kingship and does not hesitate to say the king stands under the Bible, he does not try to change any kind of rule like that. Later John Knox in Geneva wrote his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* to try to create some sort of unrest in England and Scotland against the reign of the two Maries. Calvin was very disturbed about that, and he said it was not legitimate. He says we cannot overthrow properly constituted governments, even if they are Catholic and ruled by women. He did not accept Knox's view at all.

Clearly Calvin also prefers what he calls "aristocracy or aristocracy tempered by democracy" in Book IV, chapter 20, section 8. He wants some kind of representation but not pure democracy. For Calvin that would be tantamount to anarchy where everyone has equal vote and is able to vote on everything. There are not many pure democracies in the world if there are any since the days of the Greek city-states. When Calvin says "aristocracy tempered by democracy" he probably means there is an elite ruling class, and the people have some say in some things. By elite he does not mean those born elite. It is not an

aristocracy that is by class. He has in mind an aristocracy not by privilege but by talent. The best-qualified people should govern, and the people can have some say in it.

Something like that actually transpired in Geneva. Geneva had three councils, the Little Council, the Council of Sixty, and the Council of Two Hundred. The government was a rather complex interrelation between these three councils. The people had some voice, but it was not like a democracy. The Roman Senate came close to this in the days of the Republic before the empire. It was very close to what Calvin describes here. Calvin's view is that we should have government shared and not concentrated in one person. He does not try to oppose kingship or overthrow it, but it is not his preference. His preference is to have an aristocracy of excellence, according to McNeill's footnote.

Another reason for that is a point that I made earlier. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 8, Calvin says there is safety in numbers "because of men's failing so that they may help one another, teach and admonish one another." We are imperfect sinners, so it is good to have more people involved in government. It is good to be governed by a lot of sinners than just one sinner! That helps to balance things.

I was struck recently in reading an article in *Books and Culture*. It quoted from Samuel Ling's book called *Reflections on the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C.* Dr. Ling has taught at Covenant some. He is a PCA minister who lives in Los Angeles. He is an expert on China and is Chinese. He is a good friend and a very fine man. This review of some other books does mention Dr. Ling's book. It says, "Ironically, some modern Chinese thinkers have come to the conclusion that what Chinese culture requires from the Christian spirit is the teaching of original sin." It struck me as being most unusual that Chinese thinkers are saying that what we need is the doctrine of original sin. It goes on to say that a philosopher active in China's democracy movement has argued that the Christian emphasis on sin provides "the ultimate philosophical base for the establishment of social covenants, checks and balances of power, and the rule of law. Denial of man's sin and limitations is the spiritual root of tyranny. Our awareness of such, the beginning of democracy." I am not sure if this man claimed to be a Christian, but as a philosopher, he says we need the doctrine of original sin in order to develop a government that is more like a democracy and less like a tyranny. That is exactly what we have in Calvin. If anyone wants a doctrine of original sin, we have one, and we will be glad to share it! It is interesting to see it come up in that context. It is a felt need; we need this because without it we are not going to be able to develop a civil government that will be helpful and not harmful to us. Sometimes Calvin has been called the "virtual founder of America." When people use that expression, I think they mean that Calvin's encouragement of representative government and his doctrine of sin, which encourages a system of checks and balances and which we have in our government, can be traced back to the teaching of Calvin.

Let me talk about the exercise of force in government. Calvin says that civil government can exercise force and make use of the sword. That is exactly what civil government does. Without any authority to punish, civil government would be weak and ineffective. Calvin says, "The magistrate must avoid both excessive severity but also cruelest gentleness." There should and can be punishments but not excessive punishments. On the other hand, if the civil government does not punish, it has no power. Government walks a line between excessive severity and cruel gentleness or weakness. Calvin feels government can also use the sword to wage war. This lines up with the Christian tradition all the way back to Augustine. Book IV, chapter 20, section 11 gives the chief summary sentence of Calvin's view on this. He says, "Wars are lawful to preserve the tranquility of the state's dominion, to restrain the seditious stirrings of restless men, to help those forcibly oppressed, and to punish evil deeds."

Trying to apply that to the recent war in Iraq, at least several of Calvin's statements would fit. To help

those forcibly oppressed and to punish evil deeds seem to fit the purpose of that war. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 12, Calvin says war is right and just if it serves those purposes, but “it must be governed by extreme necessity.” It must be done as a last resort. War can be just and right, but there has to be extreme necessity. There cannot be anger or hatred. Calvin seems almost idealistic here. He says you can fight someone, but you cannot be angry with or hate him or her. There must not be “implacable severity.” There must be limitations. There are a lot of qualifications that he lays out. War is right if it is for certain reasons.

Calvin says government also has a right to tax the people. Calvin is rather sensitive about this. When he writes, he says taxing people is almost the very blood of the people. He does not view this as just a minor thing. He says governments have the right to tax but only for legitimate cause. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 13, Calvin says if tax is not for legitimate cause, it is what he calls “tyrannical extortion.” Proper taxes are acceptable, though. They are for the public expenses of the magistrates’ office or for running the country. He also admits that this money can be used for the proper magnificence of their household. The magistrates can live well. They can have not only a decent house but a very nice one. It is not wrong to raise tax for that as long as it is proper and not too extravagant. It is certainly not to be squandered.

Let us talk about the laws that should govern a state. We did this earlier when we talked about Calvin’s view of law. I will repeat it again here because it comes up again here. The state should be governed by the common laws of nations. Each state has the right to make its own laws, generally observing what other states do, both in the past and in the present. Book IV, chapter 20, section 15 says these laws must be in conformity to “that perpetual rule of love.” You check laws by the rule of love. Book IV, chapter 20, section 14 says, “We need not recreate the political system of Moses.” We do not have to go back to the judicial law of the Old Testament and try to put that in place. That is not what happened in Geneva. Mosaic Law can be used as a model or a guide, and the principles of love and equity that were present in those laws of Moses should be present in modern laws. Calvin says laws indeed vary in form but have the same purpose, which is equity, justice, mercy, and love. If that is the goal of the law, it does not matter what form the law takes.

It is interesting that Calvin also deals with the matter of lawsuits and whether or not it is proper for people to sue each other. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 17, Calvin says it is “permissible if rightly used.” He explains it as “a set principle for all Christians, that a lawsuit, however just, can never be rightly prosecuted by any man unless he treat his adversary with the same love and goodwill as if the business under controversy were already settled and composed.” You can sue someone, but the attitude and spirit in it all is to treat the person as though it never happened or had already been settled. That speaks to the inner spirit being without anger, desire to avenge, or hurt. Calvin admits that an example of an upright litigant is rare. You do not usually find this. Calvin is trained in law, so he is in his own territory here. He knows that when people go to law they do not tend to love each other very much. Even though they should love each other, Calvin says it is rare. In 1 Corinthians 6:5-8, Paul seems to say not to go to law. Calvin’s comment in Book IV, chapter 20, section 21 is that “Paul inveighs against that mad lust to go to law, not simply against all controversies.” Whether Calvin is right about that or not is something we could probably debate. He says that Paul does not say never to go to law but do not have a desire to always sue someone. You should not go to law at the drop of a hat. Calvin says, to sum it up, “Love will give every man the best counsel.”

Let us talk about civil disobedience. Is it ever right for people to rise up in opposition to civil government? Calvin goes through the scriptural passages that command obedience to rulers. Scripture

particularly commands us to honor the king. The magistrate cannot be resisted without God being resisted. We are bound to “reverence and esteem wicked rulers.” Calvin adds in Book IV, chapter 20, section 24 to esteem wicked rulers “as far as is possible.” There seems to be a slight limitation there. Paul says we are to obey the king, but he writes about a wicked Roman emperor when he says that. We are bound to revere and esteem all rulers. Calvin says it teaches us patience. We are to consider our own sin. He says unjust rulers have been raised up by God to punish the wickedness of the people. Maybe the reason that we have a wicked ruler is because of our sin. We should be patient, repent, and seek God. He says we should also implore the help of God. “It is not for us to remedy such evils. Only this remains: to implore the Lord’s help.” Be patient and pray a lot! When the Huguenots were being martyred regularly in France, they wanted to begin to raise an army and defend themselves. Calvin counseled against it, saying that they should not do that. He told them they can pray, and they can die. Those were his instructions to them. Later the Huguenots decided not to follow Calvin much longer in this. They were praying and dying, so resistance movements began to develop toward the end of Calvin’s life. Calvin wrote to Collinge, the French Huguenot leader, in 1561, “It would be better should we all perish 100 times than expose the Gospel to such a disgrace.” To take up arms in the name of Christ was a disgrace. Calvin said it would be better to die.

When Calvin seems to have totally closed the door, there is a little crack that he leaves open. Some others push that crack further and throw the door wide open eventually. Calvin’s crack is that he talks about the role of the open avengers in Book IV, chapter 20, section 30. “If there is a wicked government, then God may choose to raise up open avengers, people armed from heaven.” These are people directed by God’s hand to punish wicked rulers. God raises up these open avengers such as Moses, who delivered Israel from Pharaoh. Other open avengers were the Assyrians to overthrow and punish the Jews. You never really get in Calvin a program for revolution. Calvin does not say that God sometimes raises up open avengers, so they should become open avengers. That is more what John Knox wanted to do. The open avengers recognize that this idea in Calvin acknowledges that God is in the overthrow of governments. Sometimes He overthrows governments, but it is not our marching orders. Book IV, chapter 20, section 31 says, “No command is given to us except to obey and suffer.” That does not really tell anybody what to do who is living in an unjust government. But it does serve the function of warning an evil ruler. Calvin also says in Book IV, chapter 20, section 31, “Let the princes hear and be afraid.” God sometimes raises up open avengers to overthrow unjust governments. He does not apply that to people, that they become involved in a rebellion, but he applies it to the rulers, that they be afraid and perhaps change their ways.

That is not much of a crack in the door, but a bigger crack comes when Calvin talks about the role of the magistrates of the people. The people cannot overthrow an unjust government, but the magistrates of a people have a certain right and responsibility here. Calvin says the magistrates’ constitutional function is the protection of the people against the misuses of the king. He goes back through history and shows how at different times in history (the Spartan ephors, the Roman tribunes, the Greek demarks, the German town guildmasters) there have been these properly constituted lesser magistrates. These are magistrates of the people that different governments have had. There was a king or ruler, and then there were the magistrates of the people. They have the right to attempt to influence and change the government if necessary. In Book IV, chapter 20, section 31, Calvin says, “If there are now any magistrates of the people...” He is not sure that this category still exists. He points out that modern nations have something similar, at least on the books. The three estates in France, for instance, had not met for 30 years when Calvin wrote this. They still had not met in 1559, so even though technically there was a category there, it was not functioning. It is much like Parliament in England, which would only meet when the king decided he wanted it to meet in order to raise taxes. Calvin says that properly constituted officials may oppose the king or the ruler, and McNeill comments that “this is more



influential in that it came as a concession at the end of a discussion that is anxiously conservative.” Calvin does not want to do anything to encourage anarchy. To him that is the worst of all worlds. He is very cautious in trying not to foment rebellion. He was very upset with John Knox when he wrote *First Blast of the Trumpet*. Even his section on the lesser magistrates is not an incitement for people to revolt. It is an appeal to the magistracy to fulfill its legitimate function.

That is the end of the *Institutes*. Let me close by reading the very end. It says, “Since this edict has been proclaimed by the heavenly herald, Peter, who said we must obey God rather than men, let us comfort ourselves with the thought that we are rendering that obedience which the Lord requires when we suffer anything rather than turn aside from piety. In that our courage may not grow faint, Paul pricks us with another goad, that we have been redeemed by Christ at so great a price as our redemption cost Him so that we should not enslave ourselves to the wicked desires of men, much less be subject to their impiety.” Calvin seems to end where he starts. Almost the first sentence is about piety in Book I, chapter 1, section 1. The goal is love for God, piety, and devotion. Now he says it is better to suffer anything than to lose that. Calvin seems to say that piety is our goal, and nothing should deflect us from that. We are not enslaved to the wicked desires of men, though. It is hard to know what Calvin means by that, whether he means the wicked ruler or wicked people in general. Whatever he means, he is concerned at the end to come back to the beginning. He underscores the importance of our piety. That is not yet the last word, because Calvin wrote the last word in very large letters. It is translated into English and placed in very large letters in our version. He says, “God be praised.” That is the last word.

I have enjoyed going through all of this with you, and I hope you will have occasion in the future to bring out your *Institutes* and look at them again.