

Lesson 27 **THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT, KINGDOM OF GOD**

27.1 **The Civil Government**

1. The **Origin** of Civil Government

In treating the place of government, the confession includes kings, princes and magistrates; thus, both the legislative and executive elements of government are included. Courts and judges are included as well as all kinds of legal authorities, that is, civic, regional, provincial, and federal authorities. All levels of government have their origin in God, Romans 13:1; John 19:11. Originally, justice was administered in families and tribes; later, God appointed prophets, priests and judges, Leviticus 8; Numbers 11:16f; Exodus 18:13f, and still later kings and princes only ruled by His decree, Proverbs 8:15, 16; Isaiah 45:1.

In the Old Testament, the unbelieving princes receive their appointment and anointing from God, Exodus 9:16; 1 Kings 11:14; Isaiah 45:1; Daniel 2:36, 47, 4:34f. They all must fulfil their purpose in God's eternal counsel. Although God especially leads His chosen people, He is King of all the earth, Psalm 82, 93, 94, 96, 97. All those in authority are accountable to Him.

2. The **Task** of Civil Government

As government is inherent in the created world, its task is more than simply a negative one, that is, more than the restraining of sin. The duty of government is to preserve harmony and order in public life, and reflect God's image in the use and rule of men and resources. The government is armed with the sword, Romans 13:4; this sword includes the making and enforcing of laws governing

decency and order in society. Here the government is bound by the Ten Commandments as they relate to public life. The principles of freedom of religion or freedom of the press may not be used in order to break down the standards of public order or public morality.

3. The **Limitations** of Civil Government

Regardless of whether the magistrates believe or not, the Church has the duty to pray for them and to be subject to them, Romans 13:1; 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Peter 3:13, 17. Even when they exact payments which break the bounds of Biblical justice, we must yield to their authority. But when demands are made which would force believers to transgress the law of God, believers must resist, Acts 5:29; Daniel 3:16; Matthew 22:15f. Also, believers may support and follow national leaders who in good faith seek to deliver their countrymen from the yoke of tyranny and oppression, Acts 14:16f, 17:26f; Psalm 44.

27.2 **The Kingdom of God**

1. The **Coming** of the Kingdom

The role and task of civil government should be seen in the perspective of the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God refers to God's rule or kingship over heaven and earth. God is and remains King, Psalm 98, 99, but reveals His kingship in a special way. The kingdom of God is revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ, Matthew 3:3, 4:17. He is the long-awaited Messiah, and in Him, God establishes His rule upon earth again. All power and dominion is taken away from the devil, the prince of this world Luke 10:18; Ephesians 2:2, and given to Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:18, 19.

The kingdom comes with Christ's coming and work. It is not a kingdom of this world, John 18:36, yet it is revealed in this world. The kingdom is established on earth through the death and resurrection of Christ. His death constitutes the defeat of Satan and his angels, His resurrection and ascension constitutes His enthronement in glory over heaven and earth. He is now King of kings and Lord of lords, 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14, 19:16, and all kings and rulers on earth are subject to Him. A civil ruler can serve His kingdom without believing in Him; he cannot disregard Him with success.

2. The **Fulfilment** of the Kingdom

While the kingdom has come, it has not reached completion. Thus, the Church prays, "Thy kingdom come". The Lord Jesus establishes His rule through His Word and Spirit, and His kingship is manifested in the gathering of His Church. God's people are the citizens of the kingdom, Philippians 3:20, and the power of the kingdom is manifested in individual and communal confession in the world. Like God's kingship, this confession governs all of life, and has both a positive and antithetical thrust. It is the calling of the Church to witness to Jesus Christ and His lordship in all areas of life.

The gathering of the Church and ensuing establishment of the kingdom is the work of Jesus Christ. He fulfils His Messianic office (prophet, priest, king) through His Word and Spirit. He sends His office bearers, He gives the keys of the kingdom, Matthew 16:19f; Matthew 18:18f. With the completion of His task, He will turn the completed and cleansed kingdom over to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:25f, after which God will be all in all.

Exercises Lesson 27

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18, 31, 39, 40, 48.
Belgic Confession, Article 36, 37.
Canons of Dort, Chapter III/IV. 3, 4; Rejection of Errors 7.

II. Review Questions

1. Why must we be subject to the civil authorities?
2. When may we disobey the civil authorities? When may we speak up against them? How should this be done?
3. When did the LORD institute authority? How long will authority be present in human life?
4. Who normally refuse to take the oath or to join the armed services? See Lord's Day 37. What is wrong with this stand?
5. What standard should the civil authorities abide by in passing laws?
6. Show the need for authority in society from Scripture.

III. Extra Questions

1. Who is the “man of lawlessness” and when will he appear? What will he do to all authority?
2. What is the role of angels in civil government? See Deuteronomy 32:8; Psalm 82:1,2; Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1.
3. What form of government is most compatible with the Scriptures? Prove your answer.
4. What is our political calling?