Josiah, Erastianism, and National Covenanting  
Part Three  
by Albert Hembd

[Editor's Note: This is the third paper of a series that originally were email posts to FPCR's Internet discussion group, The Westminster Forum. Mr. Hembd wrote his articles as part of a discussion of George Gilliespie's 17th century tract, Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty.]

III. HOW CAN THE CHRISTIAN MAGISTRATE LABOR TO BRING HIS CITIZENS INTO SUBJECTION TO THE COVENANT OF GOD, THE GOSPEL OF GOD, AND TO THE LAW OF GOD?

In this final installment of my paper, I wish to consider the final point: CAN a civil magistrate make his citizens to stand to the covenant of God? That is, is there any POWER or ABILITY promised from God to enable the magistrate to endeavor such a thing?

Remember that the second part of the original question was "what could a magistrate do today to make his citizens stand to the covenant of God?" In the word "could," there are two considerations: MAY he, and CAN he? That is, does he have a warrant in the Word of God for causing his citizens to stand to the covenant? Second, CAN he do it: that is, whence comes ability and empowerment for such a humanly impossible undertaking?

Previously, we showed conclusively how that Josiah was no Erastian. We showed how there always was a distinction between ecclesiastical and civil government in the OT, and how that Josiah in essence caused Israel to stand to the covenant, which God had already made with them. This Josiah did by making them swear to honor and uphold that covenant, in their public and private persons, by keeping their duties as commanded by the Law.

In making them thus to stand to the covenant, Josiah did not usurp the unique authorities and responsibilities delegated to the Levites alone: the regular teaching and preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. But he certainly did exhort the Levites to their duty, and he did make them SWEAR to uphold their covenant responsibilities. Certainly, a civil magistrate could do this today.

In the second place, we showed that civil magistrates, as ministers of God, are duty bound to kiss the Son. They are bound, not as ministers of Christ's Church, but as ministers to God (Romans 13:1-8), and therefore to Christ as God the Son, to honor Christ's Gospel and Christ's Law (Ps. 2:10-12). Accordingly, civil magistrates not only MAY but also MUST endeavor to cause their citizens to swear to a covenant nationally to God, to His Word, and to His Christ. Nations as nations owe their homage and allegiance to Christ the King: Ps. 72:11 and Is. 60:12.

However, we now come to the third point. How CAN a civil magistrate realistically labor to do such a humanly impossible task as this? How can a magistrate bring his citizens into subjection to the covenant of God, to the Gospel of God, and to the Law of God, when "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither can be," Romans 8:7?

In examining this topic from the Scriptures, we will find the following four points:
1) The civil magistrate CANNOT cause his people to stand to the covenant, independent of Gospel grace.

2) Gospel grace flows from the preaching of faithful ministers of the Gospel, blessed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Hence, the reformation of a land, of a nation, is something that originates within the walls of the true Church within a land, from her pulpits. It is by the sharp, two-edged sword of Law and Gospel that the enthroned Christ slays His enemies to Himself, to bring them to subjection to the rule of His Word: as persons, as particular churches, and as nations.

3) The mere preaching of Law and Gospel itself will not subdue a people to the rule of Christ. The Holy Ghost, sent by Christ, must work mightily, to apply the Word faithfully preached to sinners' hearts, and so must make the Word effectual so as to cause them to bow willingly to the rule of Christ, personally, ecclesiastically, and civilly. National covenanting is something that ultimately rests in the sovereign will of God, Who sovereignly sends His Spirit whithersoever He will, and to the degree that He wills, to bless a faithful preaching of the Word to that nation which He is visiting in mercy, with heaven-sent revival. Thus, ultimately it is the enthroned Christ Who Himself causes "kings to bow down before Him, and nations to serve Him" (Ps. 72:11). He does this by making the arrows of Law and Gospel sharp in the hearts of His enemies, to slay them to themselves, and to win them to Himself.

4) Another point we must consider is, the help of civil magistrates to the Cause of Christ in a land is a promise made TO A RISING, REFORMING CHURCH in a land, not to a declining, apostasizing church. "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, AND KINGS TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF THY RISING," Is. 60:3. Kings are sent by God, in His sovereign timing, that they should bring their forces to the Cause of a UNITED, REFORMING Church in a land. And the Church can only be rising, reforming, and uniting, where the TRUE preaching of Law and Gospel has been being blessed to the hearts and souls of men within the Visible Church.

In the last section of our paper, we proved that the sword of the civil magistrate is ineffectual to accomplish national revival in a land, which revival is essential to true reformation. The enactment of just and equitable laws in conformity to the Moral Law, accompanied with reasonable penalties, will not alone bring about the reformation of a people. They will not submit to the rule of Christ (Romans 8:7), until Christ subdues a goodly number of them with the sharp, two-edged sword of His mouth: namely, His two-edged sword of Law and Gospel. And that sharp, two-edged sword proceeds out of the mouth of His Gospel ministers, those who preach His Word. However, even that sword of Law and Gospel is ineffectual unless the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven from the enthroned Christ, sends the Word home to the sinner's heart. Thus the "arrows of the King," even King Jesus (cf. Ps. 45:5), "are made sharp in the hearts of His enemies, making them to fall down before Him." The enthroned Christ Himself must apply His Word irresistibly to the hearts of sinners, bringing "conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment," John 16:8; Christ must open the sinner's eyes to the reality of "Him with Whom we have to do," Hebrews 4:13. Christ must open the sinner's eyes to the reality of his sin, and to the odiousness of it; Christ must open the sinner's eyes to the just, righteous anger of a holy, eternal God against the sinner and his sins. And Christ must also then reveal Himself to the sinner. He must reveal Himself in all His mercy, Law-obedience, and Curse-satisfaction, which He stands ready to impart and to impute to lost, perishing sinners, to rescue them from the righteous sentence of the Law, and from the bondage of their corruption in their sin under the Law.

Then it is that the sinner sees not only the justifying mercies of Christ, but also the beauties of His holiness, and His readiness to give saving repentance to all that come to Him for it. Now it is that the sinner, being enabled to receive Christ, freely offered in the Gospel, is now able to walk "in newness of life," through the indwelling Holy Ghost, freely given from Christ. And so also Christ, by His saving light, transforms the sinner's heart into a new heart, a new heart that willingly embraces Christ and loves Him, and serves Him, in ever increasing obedience to His Law.

So it is that a sinner, now translated from the kingdom of darkness, becomes a willing subject as an INDIVIDUAL, of the Lord Jesus Christ. But now, when the Lord Jesus is at work in a nation to establish His Name and Cause, He raises up a goodly company of such faithful ones, a true Church, marked by the pure preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and church discipline faithfully maintained. Though at first the people of that land may persecute that true Church, in time, they will come to respect and
even to honor them. "But the people magnified them," says the Spirit in Acts 5:13 of the people of Jerusalem outside the Church. Many in Jerusalem were not regenerate or converted; some were adherents of the Church, though not yet living members, and others were perhaps occasional interested hearers. But the people at large respected and even admired the witness of that faithful Church in their midst, a Church which was faithful even in great persecution.

So the LORD first blesses a land that He is visiting in mercy by raising up and blessing a witness of the true Church within that land. "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising," Is. 60:3. We now come to consider this verse, Is. 60:3, more closely.

This verse, Is. 60:3, is a promise made to the reconstituted and reformed Church. Specifically, this verse found a partial fulfillment in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when Cyrus gave forth his decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the temple, the streets, and its walls. Then it was that "kings brought their forces into Zion," Is. 60:11. "Therefore shall thy gates be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought...Thou shalt also suck the milk of kings, and shalt suck the breast of kings," Is. 60:11, 16. In the days of Cyrus, the brightness of Jehovah's shining—the shining of the favor of His countenance was seen upon His Zion. This favor was first seen in the desire of the "tenth" (Is. 6:13 compared to Ezra 1:5), to return to Jerusalem, to restore the divinely instituted worship commanded by God. Prior to this, before the Babylonian captivity, "the glory of the LORD had departed" from Jerusalem, Ezekiel 11, esp. verses 22 and 23. The Spirit of the LORD, and the glory of the LORD had "gone up from the midst of the city" because of all the abominations there were therein, because of all the idolatries that were then being practiced by even the priests and elders within the Temple gates. Then, it was "Ichabod" with Jerusalem. The city was still standing, but the LORD and His glory had left them. The Church was still in existence in outward form, but the favor of the LORD had long departed, leaving them over, in time, to temporal judgments.

To the contrary: In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the glory of the LORD graciously rose afresh upon His Zion; it rose in the hearts of His people, to raise their spirits and to give them a new heart (Ezekiel 11:9). God gave them a heart that would loathe itself for its abominations, and grieve for its former ways (Ezekiel 36:31); a heart that would turn from its idolatries; a heart that would turn from idols to serve the living and true God (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Thus, the distinguishing glory was seen upon Israel again, in the stirring of the hearts of the people, while they were yet in Babylon (Ps. 137), to turn from their abominations and lying vanities, to serve again the LORD their God. And it was a distinguishing glory indeed. Darkness covered the rest of the earth, and gross darkness was seen upon all the heathen peoples of the Babylonian and Persian empires, Is. 60:2: both in their foolish idolatries, and also in their wicked lifestyles. But now, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the distinguishing glory was seen upon Zion, in her desire to serve the one and true living God, the Maker of heaven and of earth. It was seen in her loathing of her past sins and in her turning to the LORD of the whole earth. It was seen in her renewed obedience to His commandments and to His ways.

This glory of the LORD upon His people had already been seen by the heathen kings under whom they had dwelt, on certain individuals of Israel, even before the days of Cyrus. Nebuchadnezzar took note of the godliness of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as did Darius after him. Ahasuerus experienced the faithfulness of Esther and Mordecai. However, in time, the LORD also spread this vital godliness which had been seen upon a few individuals to a large contingent of the twelve tribes, in fulfillment of His Own promises to them, Jeremiah 31:31 and Ezekiel 36:26. The Spirit of the LORD breathed upon the remnant of the election of grace of that time (Ezekiel 37) and the glory of the LORD was seen upon them. God raised them from their state of spiritual death, to a living and vital godliness, as a great company and a great army: some 43,000 of them. And kings, favorably impressed with their goodness and value as citizens of the realm, lent their favor and support to their Cause, in rebuilding the walls of Zion.

But these verses—Is. 60:1-3—speaking of the glory of the LORD arising upon Zion—have a larger fulfillment in Christ's coming. The very context of Is. 60:1-3 militate that we understand these verses, actually, to have their PRIMARY fulfillment in the coming of Christ, and in His Mediatorial reign at the right hand of
the Father. Immediately preceding the words found in Is. 60:1-3, we find in Is. 59:20-21 "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever." It was to be when "the Redeemer shall come to Zion" that the glory of the LORD should rise in an unprecedented way; and that then, in a way not seen before, "kings should rise to the brightness of her rising."

Thus it was that after some three hundred and fifty years after Christ's ascension, the Roman Empire officially established the Christian religion as the religion of the empire; and now the Roman emperors and their satraps began to lend their hand to the Cause of Christ. The Christian Church, being long put to the sword by a succession of wicked Caesars, being tried in the fire, and found faithful, arose victorious. The glory of the LORD, which was seen on her throughout her persecutions, was invincible. For every martyr, ten arose in his place. The steadfastness of the martyrs was too great a witness to go unnoticed. "The people magnified them." Eventually, the Empire itself came to recognize and establish the very religion they had sought to extinguish by fire and sword. And so it was that all kings of that known world did bow down before Zion, and serve Her Cause, to bring their forces unto her.

And yet, throughout the New Testament Church age, there has not been unremitting revival, nor continuous outpourings of the Holy Ghost. Within a very short amount of time after Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church began a rapid slide into apostasy. Idolatry had already made inroads, even during the persecutions; but after the establishment, it waxed exponentially. By the seventh century A.D., the Church had become very corrupted under the rise of the Roman Papacy. Very shortly thereafter, as a righteous punishment for her wicked idolatries and doctrinal corruption, the Mohammedan infidels overrun the Eastern Church. The Western Church came under the tyrannous dominion of the Popish Antichrist, ushering in the New Testament Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Revelation 13, 14, and 17. And so, also in the NT Church, it became "Ichabod, the glory has departed."

Throughout the twelve hundred year reign of the Popish Antichrist, there were only seasons of beginnings of a return to the LORD, to the apostolic foundation of truth (as, for example, with the Waldenses, Bernard of Clairveaux, and Huss and Wycliffe). But it wasn't until the conversion of a theological professor, Martin Luther, that it pleased the LORD to visit His Church with renewed seasons of great outpourings of the Spirit of truth. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth," Ps. 72:6. Through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the apostolic preaching was revived in the visible Church at large. These outpourings of the Holy Ghost ushered in "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," cf. Acts 3:19. And so it pleased the Lord to revisit His Zion, to shower His glory afresh upon her, with a series of Reformations and Awakenings that caused newly-born justified souls to "spring up like grass" in number, cf. Ps. 72:16.

And so the glory of the LORD arose afresh upon His Church in the First and Second Reformations, and in the subsequent Awakenings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The glory of the LORD having arisen again upon His Church, "kings [again] arose to the brightness of Zion's rising," cf. Is. 60:3. Prince Electors, like Frederick the Wise; kings, like Edward the Sixth; and Parliaments, as in Holland and England, gave the right hand of their strength to the Cause of Christ in their realms.

Now, it is important here that we note some essential truths concerning the Establishment Principle as it is expounded in Holy Writ. First of all, kings are not the prime movers in the Reformation of a land or of a Church. To the contrary, there is first an arising in Zion, in the fresh outpouring of the Spirit of glory from the ascended Christ, upon His Church. THEN, kings arise, TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE CHURCH'S RISING. Cunning political savvy and coalitions of sects do not forge reformatons. Neither does the LORD move the hearts of kings to put forth their civil power to forward the cause of an apostate church, of a church riddled with heresies, sects, schisms, and worldly disobedience. No, the LORD raises up magistrates to forward the Cause of an already rising Church, a true Church united by the bond of truth. Indeed, we may safely presume that in most instances the conversion of the magistrate, or at least his respect for the Cause of
Zion, is spawned by the revival of faithful preaching within the Temple gates.

As we said before, Gospel grace does not originate with magistrates. Gospel grace originates with the faithful, fearless preaching of men called of God; men who themselves have been sifted by the Law, melted by the Gospel, and forged in the fire of affliction. Moreover, as we said before, true preaching is not sufficient for the conversion of the sinner: no, the preaching of faithful men must also be blessed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Then it is that the LORD comes down upon His Church "like rain upon the mown grass," Ps. 72: 6. When the glory of the LORD is again seen in Zion, through the faithful preaching of the Holy Gospel, applied and blessed by the Almighty workings of the sovereign Spirit of God, THEN, kings and nations arise to Zion's glory, in the LORD's good time. Hence, the prime instruments for the initiation of reformation in a land are not magistrates; magistrates are secondary instruments. No, the primary instruments whose means are blessed are the teaching Levites, the preachers of the holy Gospel, the ministers of Jesus Christ. How greatly then does the welfare of a land depend upon a faithful Gospel ministry! And how little of that is there today in our pulpits, overrun with man-made, Arminian, decision oriented preaching! How can the LORD send His glory upon Zion, when Zion is giving all the glory for salvation (or even part of it) to man! "I am the LORD; and MY GLORY WILL I NOT GIVE UNTO ANOTHER," Is. 42:8. The righteous LORD will not give the glory of salvation, which is all His, to another, that is, to man's free will, to man's labors and gimmicky evangelistic techniques, etc. And so it is that Arminian preaching can only serve to quench true Biblical revival and reformation in a land.

Thus, it urgently behooves the magistrate to forward true Gospel preaching, with all of his might. And it must be TRUE preaching, sovereign grace preaching. The LORD blesses the Word of truth to beget sinners anew, cf. James 1:18. How apt are the timely words of George Whitefield of old, in the opening to his sermon "Method of Grace:"

"As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world, is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskilled guides. And yet, in all ages, we find that there have been many wolves in sheep's clothing, many that daubed with untempered mortar, that prophesied smoother things than God did allow."

May the LORD bless anything said in this paper that is according to the mind of His blessed Spirit of truth.

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**Why The Blue Banner?**

We are no longer printing in two color so our masthead is no longer printed blue, and since we are always adding names to our subscriber list we thought we'd explain the title for this newsletter. The name was chosen from admiration and attachment to the days of the Covenanters who fought for religious freedom from the imposition of the doctrines and commandments of men, and from the tyranny of government control of the church. They were fighting for the Crown Rights of King Jesus as the only lawgiver and governor in his church. Some of the troops had blue banners blazoned with red lion-ramparts breathing the phrase, *For Christ's Crown and Covenant*. In a nostalgic fashion we use this title to look back to a purer, more zealous age. Yet with hope in God, we also look forward to a day when the church again is at the stature of those days. And beyond that, we hope for a day when the church shall not be fighting to gain back to the level of past achievements, but is forging ahead and exceeding the strides made at the Reformation. In some small measure, we trust, this newsletter will witness to the past and prepare the next generation to do great things for the Lord.
What's New with The Blue Banner Newsletter and Web Site

Changing The Blue Banner Again?
In 1998 we plan to go back to a monthly publication schedule for The Blue Banner. We are doing almost all the work on the newsletter “in-house” now and this has reduced the costs significantly. Hopefully, we can get each issue to subscribers during the month it is dated.

Forthcoming articles for the Newsletter and Web
Some may believe FPCR has spent too much time addressing issues that concern only a handful of folks, like the errors of the Steelites. This is a concern of ours as well. In the coming months of 1998 we hope to turn our attention to the Anti-Trinitarian error of the Jesus-only Pentecostals, continue Pastor Bacon’s Larger Catechism #4 sermons, and review some important books.

FPCR Visitors and Hits
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In late December, FPCR began to keep on the web site four or five weeks of audio files from the Morning and Afternoon worship services. We have been very encouraged by the initial response to this ministry, and have doubled our web site space for the room to accommodate the large audio files.

New Articles
Since our last update in The Blue Banner (April/June 1997) the following articles have been added to the Web site:

- How Dr. Hills became a KJV Believer.
- Review of Einwechter's English Bible Translations, Johnson.
- The Westminster Directory for Public Worship and the Lining of the Psalms by Chris Coldwell.
- B. B. Warfield: The Significance Of The Westminster Standards As A Creed.
- Requiem Mass — Or Resurrected Messiah? by Rev. Dr. George Logan, D. Min., Ph.D. Th. D.
- Antichrist in Scripture, by Francis Nigel Lee.
- Josiah, Erastianism, and National Covenanting, by Al Hembd.
- The Chief End of Man, WLC#1.
- The Light of Nature, WLC #2.
- The Light of God's Word, WLC #2.
- The Word of God, WLC #3.
- WLC#4. The Consistency of Scripture.
- WLC#4. The Scope of the Whole Scriptures.
- WLC#4. The Light and Power of Scripture.
- Musical Instruments in Psalm 150, Richard Bacon.
- James Durham on Preaching.
- Calvin's Preface to the Psalter (1543).
- Paul's Discourse on Head Coverings in Public Worship: An Exposition of 1 Cor. 11:2-16. By Richard Bacon.
- Public Worship to be preferred before Private, David Clarkson (Puritan).
- First Presbyterian Rowlett's Opposition to Images of Christ: A Public Correction Regarding Kevin Reed's Testimony Against Prominent Errors of Our Times.
- A Response to Mr. Reed's Letter of Clarification Regarding FPCR's Public Correction.
- Response to Mr. Reed's Second and Third Replies.
- Debate over Images, and Images of Christ in the imagination (edited file of posts to RPCNA's Cov.ieforum).
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