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## The Westminster Confession of Faith

*Week 7*

### 22:1 Oaths and Vows in the Bible

#### Definitions

Oath: concerns man's duty to man; calls God to witness what he says or promises to men

Vow: concerns man's duty to God; solemn promise to God

Should we swear at all? Mt. 5:33-37

Context addresses man's lies: Pharisees (Matthew 23:16-22)

Jesus made oaths - eg. Mt. 6:2, 16

### 22:2 Occasions for Oaths and Vows

Serious and weighty matters (Dt. 6:13; Lv. 19:12; 1 Cor. 1:23) when it is necessary to secure confidence and end strife (because men do lie)

When authority requires one under such circumstances we are obliged (1 Ki. 8:31; Neh. 13:25; Ez. 10:5) eg. marriage oaths, church membership

### 22:3, 4 What Oaths Are

Oaths are serious: perjury is sin (Ps. 24:4)

Oaths contrary to scripture are not binding (Mt. 14:2-12; Judges 11-12 – Jephthah's daughter)

Oaths should be serious, not tricks

Oaths bind the swearer even to his own hurt (Ps. 15:4) and even to the ungodly (Josh. 9:18)

### 22:5, 6, 7 What Vows Are

Vows made only to God

Vows should be voluntarily

Vows must be agreeable to Word of God, must not hinder obedience, must be in person's power to fulfill

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### **23:1 Civil Governments are Legitimate**

Civil governments are God ordained (Ro. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13-17)

Civil governments are under God's authority

The purpose of civil governments is God's glory and our (the public's) good

The role of civil governments is to defend and encourage the good and to punish the evil (1 Pt. 2:13-17)

### **23:2 How Christians Relate to Government**

Christians may hold public office

Christians may engage in just war (private and national): Just War Theory  
just cause must be present (life and property?);  
just intention must be present;  
war must be last resort;  
must be formal declaration of war;  
must have limited objectives that correspond to provocation;  
must use proportionate means;  
non-combatant immunity

### **23:3 Civil Government Limits and Responsibilities**

The Civil Magistrate may not:  
administer the sacraments;  
administer discipline;  
interfere in matters of faith;  
interfere with Christian church discipline

The Civil Magistrate may and must:  
protect the freedom of Christian churches;  
protect person and good name of its people;  
secure that all religious assemblies be held without disturbance

### **23:4 Christian Duty**

Christians should pray for magistrates (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

Christians should pay their taxes (Ro. 13:6-7)

Christians should obey the government:  
for conscience' sake (Ro. 13:5);  
even if government is ungodly (1 Pt. 2;13-17);  
only if it is lawful (Acts 5:29; cf. WCF XX2 - conscience is free from commandments of men contrary to his word)

Clergy is bound by law

Pope does not have civil jurisdiction

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