

GOD AND GOVERNMENT

Separation of Church and State

Government *begins* with and is *accountable* to God.

Review

We are learning to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, which means that we filter every idea, philosophy, or cultural movement through the Scriptures. We either take those ideas captive, as Paul said, or they will take us captive.

So far, we’ve learned that what we believe about God (theology) affects what we believe about everything else. True wisdom begins with a knowledge and fear of God, but foolishness begins when God is eliminated from the equation. We likened it to opening Pandora’s Box. Rejecting the truth of God leads to worldview disasters.

In the third session, we previewed five other worldviews – Secular Humanism, Cosmic Humanism, Postmodernism, Marxism/Communism, and Islam. Then, we looked closely at Secular Humanism and Postmodernism, two views that lead societies into an abyss of chaos, destruction, and death. In the next three sessions, we will consider Marxism or Communism, its tenets and their consequences, and how it opposes a biblical worldview.

Mistakes We Make

Regarding the topic of Communism, American Christians typically make four mistakes. First, we consider Communism a dead idea, one that is no longer a threat, since the Cold War is over, and the Soviet Union was dissolved (1991). However, Americans are deceived. Communism is very much alive, and it is quickly making inroads in the United States.

The second mistake we make with Communism is thinking that Communism only relates to the area of politics and economics. Again, that is unfortunate. That is like saying Christianity or Islam only relate to the area of religion. Not true. Both affect one’s view of every area of society. Communism is more than a system of government or economics. It is also belief system that affects every area of society.

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The third mistake we make regarding Communism is disconnecting it with its “siblings.” The truth is that Marxism (philosophy of Karl Marx) is a “family” with several members – Communism, socialism, fascism, communitarianism, progressivism, and others. The difference between these “siblings” is simply the degree of ownership and control that the State has over society, the most severe member being Communism.

The fourth mistake we make regarding Communism is that we believe Communism is a topic that should not be discussed in church (secular-sacred divide). Perhaps it is because of the so-called separation of church and state. Maybe it is because we are only allowed to talk about the gospel in church, or maybe we are afraid that a discussion on Communism will get too political. Whatever the reason, we have been deceived into thinking that topics like these do not belong here.

But such a claim insinuates that these topics fall outside of God’s authority, when the Bible teaches that “the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it” (*Ps. 24:1; Col. 1:16*). In other words, nothing falls outside of God’s superintendence. As the Creator, He retains the right to speak into any topic, no matter how controversial. We should seek His wisdom on all subjects.

The better question we should be asking is this, “Does God have anything to say about these topics?” If He does, then we are obliged to know what it is. The Bible has much to say about the issues that concern us. Looking at them from His perspective enlightens our understanding and cultivates a biblical worldview.

So then, before diving into the topic of Marxism or Communism, we need to address these mistakes and discover what a biblical approach looks like. What exactly is the right relationship of church and state? How does developing a biblical worldview interact with topics like Marxism or Communism?

Six Views of Church and State

Historically, Christians have held to six views regarding the church’s relationship to civil government. Wayne Grudem addresses these views in his book *Politics According to the Bible*. The following paragraphs are excerpts from that book.

The first view is the idea that *civil government should compel people to support or follow one religion*. However, this view is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus and with the nature of faith. Jesus distinguished the realms of God and Caesar (*Matt. 22:18-21*). He also refused to compel people to believe in Him (*Luke 9:52-55*). Genuine faith cannot be forced. True faith in God must be voluntary. Therefore, governments should never attempt to force people to follow or believe in one religion, rather they should guarantee freedom of religion for followers of all religions. [This view aligns with the original understanding of the separation of Church and State.]

The opposite of the “compel religion” position is the second view that says *Christians should completely exclude religion from government and politics*. Accordingly, religious beliefs should never be mentioned in governmental functions or on government property and should never play a role in the political process. Religious belief should be kept at home. [This position aligns with the new distorted interpretation of the separation of Church and State.]

The “reject religion from all government” view fails to distinguish the reasons for a law from the content of the law. There are religious reasons behind many of our laws, but these laws do not establish a religion. This view also overrides the will of the people, society’s true authority, and this view changes freedom of religion to freedom from religion. It wrongly restricts freedom of religion and freedom of speech; and it removes from government God’s teaching about good and evil. [God has much to say about government. In fact, government was His idea. Therefore, to remove His influence from civil government contradicts His original intent. Also, remember, all worldviews are religious in nature. Government will always be influenced by religion.]

According to the third view, *all use of government power is deeply infected by demonic forces*. Satan told Jesus that all worldly kingdoms had been given to him (*Luke 4:5-7*). But we must remember that Satan is the father of lies. Government is a gift from God, something that is subject to His rule and used by Him for His purposes. [He is Sovereign; Satan is not.]

The fourth view is promoted by those who say that the Church is *only called to preach the Gospel*, not to deal with politics. However, this view of the Gospel is too narrow. The Gospel is about God’s good news for all of life. To preach the whole Gospel is to preach the entirety of God’s Word, even what He says about civil government. Which parts of the Bible should the Church not preach about? Since these things are included in the Bible, God must count them important for the advancement of His purposes. Forgiveness of sins is not the only message of the Gospel. The Gospel affects every area of life, including government. [The Church cannot avoid getting political, because the State will interfere with the Church’s mission and doctrine.]

The fifth view says that the Church should *try to elect leaders, change laws, and transform the culture*. This view is often referred to as the Social Gospel or social activism, when the Church focuses on fixing social problems politically and places its trust in government to save society. If we ever begin to think that good leaders or good laws alone will solve a nation’s problems or bring about a righteous and just society, we will have made a huge mistake.

The sixth view is the biblical view. Christians should *seek to influence civil government according to God’s moral standards* and His purposes for government as revealed in the Bible. This view is not compulsion, it is not silence, it is not dropping out of the process, nor is it thinking that only government can save us. It is much closer to the teaching of the Bible. The Bible includes many examples of God’s people influencing civil government. Without Christian influence, governments have no moral compass. If Christians are silent, then where will moral standards come from? The Church is the pillar of truth and morality in society (*1 Tim. 3:15*).

Separation of Church and State

How does the view of Christians influencing government reconcile with the separation of Church and State? First, we must understand that the modern definition of this separation has been distorted from its original meaning. Today, separation of Church and State means that the two institutions can have nothing to do with each other. For example, Bibles, prayer, and the Ten Commandments are not allowed in

government-run schools, Christmas trees cannot be placed on government property, and pastors cannot talk about political issues. This interpretation has sparked the “Freedom from Religion Movement,” which is opposite of the original intent.

The words “separation, church, and state” do not appear in any of America’s founding documents. The idea came from a quote by our third President Thomas Jefferson. He wrote a letter to a group of Baptists who were concerned that the federal government was going to establish one denomination for all Americans. Jefferson wrote in the letter that this action was impossible because “there exists a wall of separation between Church and State.” He was referring to the *First Amendment* of the Constitution, which prohibits Congress from establishing laws regarding religion. However, what Jefferson intended by “separation” has since been used against Christianity in America.

The Founders believed in the separation of Church and State, but their position was based on biblical grounds. Jesus separated God and Caesar when He instructed people to give to both (*Matt. 22:18-21*). Jesus was indicating that priests and rulers have separate duties, and both need money to perform them. In the Old Testament, God separated the responsibilities of kings and priests. Anytime that a ruler crossed the line and performed a duty of a priest, he was reprimanded or punished. In other words, there exists a natural, God-ordained separation between Church and State.

The biblical understanding of the separation of Church and State is that the Church should not control the State, as in the days of the Popes in the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, the State should not control the Church, as in the days when monarchs forced their subjects into a particular religion or denomination. Many of the people who fled to America in the 17th and 18th Centuries were fleeing religious persecution, both from the Church and the State. They sought religious freedom in the New World. These immigrants recognized the fact that rulers do not have the authority to determine how people should worship God.

Now, while the Church and State should never control the other, they should encourage one another. For example, the Church should encourage Christians to be

good citizens and to obey the laws and leaders (*Rom. 13:1-7*). Likewise, the State should encourage people to go to church, where they are challenged to live moral lives, to be better citizens. The two entities should complement each other, not control each other.

However, the idea of the Church encouraging people to support the State is a fine line. On either side of that line are hazards that can lead churches in unbiblical directions. A church that supports the State too much falls into the trap of endorsing political parties, platforms, or candidates. Such a church may even put its confidence in political structures to affect change or save society. That hazard is referred to as the Social Gospel, looking to human means (government) for salvation or social change rather than to Christ’s true Gospel. However, on the other side of the line, churches fail to say anything at all about government or cultural issues, thus depriving believers of a biblical worldview and leaving them to follow the world’s perverted but persuasive arguments and actions.

Walking the Line at Henderson Hills

In 2011, the Elders articulated their understanding of the biblical relationship between the Church and the State. Note how they navigated that fine line.

We are blessed to live in a nation in which its citizens can participate in the election of their leaders and the formation of their laws. As Christians, we are encouraged to be involved in that process, whether by discussing or supporting candidates, parties, and issues, or by voting or running for office. However, the subject in question is not the citizen but the Church, not the individual but the institution. What role should the Church, as a corporate body, play in this or any political system? Should the Church serve as an action committee, endorsing candidates and parties? Should the Church play any role at all, or should it abandon the political arena altogether?

Henderson Hills will not endorse political candidates, platforms, or parties for the following reasons:

1. *To protect the Church from getting distracted from its divine mission*

The Church, as a corporate body, was established by God for advancing the Gospel¹ and edifying the followers of Christ,² not for the purpose of advancing a political agenda.

2. *To protect the Church from false teaching and doctrinal impurity*

By endorsing candidates, the Church is condoning their beliefs and behavior, which may or may not align with biblical teaching and which ambitious men may distort and use to their advantage.³

3. *To protect the Church from being unequally yoked*

Christ and His Kingdom transcend all political candidates, platforms, and parties.⁴ Thus, it is unfitting and unwise for His Church to associate with them. Such a union hinders the Church's effectiveness to minister.

4. *To protect the Church from placing its hope in human ability*⁵

By endorsing candidates or parties, the Church is putting its confidence in the abilities of men to transform the culture externally, when men should put their hope in God to transform the culture internally.

The Church has a critical role to play in the political arena. The hope for society is the Gospel, and the Church is the pillar and support for that hope.⁶ The most powerful tools we have to change the culture are to propagate the Gospel and disciple the saved. We must not substitute politics for the power of Christ to change lives. Sin is the source of all our troubles. Christ, working in the hearts of individuals, is the solution.

We are committed to advancing the Gospel of Christ, which includes the whole counsel of God; yet, as we stand by God's clear teaching in Scripture, we recognize that His standards of truth and morality will, in time, become political, as they confront the beliefs and practices of secular society. Therefore, it is impossible for the Church to operate in isolation from the political arena.

In summary, in order to protect the body of Christ at Henderson Hills, we are choosing to refrain from political endorsements on biblical grounds and, instead, to emphasize only what the Church can and should do -- promote the Gospel as the power of God for salvation,⁷ equip its congregants with a biblical worldview, and encourage them to glorify Christ in society, wherever God may choose to use them.

Can you discover in this statement the fine line between supporting the State too much and saying nothing at all? Where are the dangers of the Social Gospel mentioned? How does this statement align with the biblical view of the Christian's influence in the political arena? Does this view allow the Church to talk about issues without crossing the line?

Notice at the end of the HHBC statement, one of the goals of the church is to "equip its congregants with a biblical worldview." That is the goal of this study. We are learning to think biblically about the issues that face our country.

How is the lie of the "new separation of church and state" being used today? The new interpretation of the separation of church and state has been used as motivation for godless men to secularize our nation's institutions, in essence relegating the church to its four walls, not allowing Christians to influence the culture the way they once did. As a result, Christian influence has been rejected and removed from our society, which has created the false idea of the secular-sacred divide. What our Founders intended was freedom *of* religion, but what we have today is freedom *from* religion.

¹ Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 3:15
² Rom. 12:10; 15:14; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:11
³ 1 Cor. 8:9; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:14, 15; 5:6; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20
⁴ Matt. 28:18a; John 18:36; 19:11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:11; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 John 1:6
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⁵ Psalm 40:4, 118:8; Prov. 3:5-7; Eph. 3: 20-21; Col. 1:27
⁶ 1 Tim. 3:15
⁷ Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18

Most Americans, and most Christians, are ignorant of the biblical principles and of the original intent of the Founders. Therefore, the “freedom from religion” movement has had great success. What we don’t recognize is that it is impossible for our institutions to be religiously neutral. They can avoid the influence of one religion but not all. By removing the influence of Christianity, they have naturally defaulted to instituting secular humanism.

Defining Government

It would be helpful here to establish the biblical principles of government, so that we can identify the lies that surround us regarding this area. When we discover God’s design and intent for government, we will easily recognize man’s distortion of it.

What is government? Webster defined government as “the exercise of authority” (*1828 Dictionary*). If anyone exercises authority — a parent, teacher, pastor, coach, boss — then he or she is governing. So then, government is everywhere. We simply must ask the question, “Who or what is in control?” to discover the nearest governing authority.

Webster further stated that all governing authorities have four functions – direction, regulation, control, and restraint. *Direction* refers to general guidance or management. *Regulation* refers to a specific body of rules or policies. *Control* refers to a system of checks or accountability, and *restraint* refers to limits, restrictions, or consequences imposed.

Parents regularly exercise these functions of authority or government in the home. For example, they practice *direction* when they say to their teenager, “Don’t stay out too late,” which is a general command. They practice *regulation* when they say, “In fact, be home no later than midnight,” providing a specific curfew. When the child returns home at 1:30 AM and the parents are waiting up for him, then they are practicing *control*, providing accountability by checking to make sure that the teen followed their order. Because the teen did not respect the curfew, the parents practice *restraint*. Consequently, they might ground the teen for a period or take away a privilege.

The Origin of Government

To find the beginning of government, one must identify the source of authority in the universe. Who or what is in control? The Bible provides the answer (*Gen. 1:1; 1 Chron. 29:11, 12; Ps. 147:5; Dan. 4:32, 35; Eph. 1:11; Matt. 28:18*). As Creator, God was the first authority, the first Governor. Thus, government originated with God. He is the Sovereign of the universe. He is in control. As Sovereign, God makes the rules for His creation and creatures (*Gen. 1:1, 26, 27; Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 45:9; Jer. 18:6; Rom. 9:20*).

If God was the first to exercise authority, then there should be evidence of His direction, regulation, control, and restraint in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2, 3*). When He placed Adam and Eve in the garden, His general *direction* to them was “to cultivate and keep it” (*2:15*). He then provided a specific *regulation* when He added, “From any tree you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...” (*2:16*). But, when the first couple disobeyed God, they experienced His *control* or accountability. He looked for them and asked, “Where are you and what have you done?” (*3:10, 11*). When they were found guilty of disobedience, God exercised *restraint* by giving them consequences (*3:14-24*).

God is the origin of authority. Therefore, all earthly authority comes from Him. He delegates a portion of His authority to human leaders (*Gen. 1:26; 2:15, 18; 3:16*). For example, parents have authority over their children, but that authority has been delegated or given to them by God. Kings, councils, congresses, judges, etc., all have authority in society, but their authority has been delegated or given to them by God (*Dan. 2:21; 4:17; John 19:10, 11; Rom. 13:1*).

Since all earthly authority originated with God and has been delegated by God, then those individuals with authority are accountable to God (*Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10*). Since the authority was originally His and it is on loan from Him, then those who have delegated authority must answer to Him for how they use it. Human authority figures are not free to use God’s authority as they please. Instead, they must stay within the boundaries He established.

However, as human authorities are corrupt by nature, they often rebel against God's authority and rule in their own interests. They reject God's sovereignty and deceive themselves by thinking that they don't answer to anyone. Any ruler who does not recognize or submit to God's authority will set himself up as God. Historically, rulers who abandon God abuse others.

The Purpose of Government

Could we exist in a world without any authority figures? Imagine living in a place where the inhabitants were evil and there were no authorities to keep them in check. No person or property would be safe from harm. Government, then, is necessary. Authority figures are a blessing to us. Knowing that sin ruined everything, God delegated His authority to leaders for the ordering and protection of mankind. Therefore, the purpose of earthly government or authority is to maintain order and to restrain the wickedness of men (*Rom. 13:3, 4*).

The Apostle Paul explained the purpose of law in his first letter to Timothy. He wrote, "Law is not made for a righteous person but for those who are lawless and rebellious..." (*1:9, 10*). In short, Paul said that government exists for those who cannot govern themselves. Laws exist to restrain the lawless.

Mankind is selfish and sinful. Without restraint, sinful people are a danger to others. Sin jeopardizes life, liberty, and property. Thus, sinful citizens must be kept in check. Remember, the freedom to do anything to anyone is called "license," and where license exists, liberty cannot. When a man practices license, he will inevitably abuse another man's liberty.

Therefore, for mankind to enjoy liberty, license cannot exist. Sinners must be restrained. Thus, liberty is dependent upon law. Only with law is license restrained and liberty preserved. Government and law, then, are not burdens but blessings. However, even human governments (authorities) must be kept in check, or they too can become a force for evil.

To understand how to keep human governments in check, one must know the four spheres of government that God ordained, as well as their respective roles and responsibilities in society.

Spheres of Government

God ordained four spheres of earthly government – the individual (self-government), the home, the church, and the civil government. Regarding these spheres, one is internal (self-government) and three are external. The success of the three external spheres relies solely on the individual to govern himself; and the need for external control depends on one's self-rule.

It is important to note that before the home, church, or civil government were established, God gave authority to individuals. God did not create a host of people in the beginning, but instead He created one individual. He also delegated authority to that individual (Adam), as a representative of all human beings to follow, "to rule over creation" (*Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15, 19, 20*).

Because all human beings are made in the image of God, then every person is equally responsible for the management of creation. Every individual has authority delegated from God for this task. At this point (Adam), no other sphere of government existed. The other spheres – home, church, and civil authority – are instituted for the good of man. Thus, man was not made for the State (civil government), but rather the State was made for man.

We see this individual delegated authority exercised in other places of scripture. For example, after the flood, when Noah and his family were the only survivors on the earth, God issued a command. "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (*Gen. 9:6*). God was reestablishing order in society, after the anarchy of the pre-flood era, and He started with one man, reminding him of His authority to exercise justice. There was no civil authority, no State, just Noah and his family.

Another example of individual authority being exercised was when Lot and his family were captured by wicked kings. "When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born of his house, 318, and went in pursuit" (*Gen. 14:14*). Abram acted on his own authority, to protect lives and property, with his own family "militia," to defeat the evil kings and liberate the hostages. Again,

there was no civil authority, just Abram exercising his God-given individual authority to practice justice.

God's delegated authority begins with the individual, who is made in His image. Individuals may join other individuals to form alliances or make agreements or covenants (i.e., marriage, church, civil authority), but those institutions do not repeal, undermine, or usurp the individual's original God-ordained authority. The American founders understood this principle and established a form of civil government under the authority of "We the People," because they knew that civil governments rule by "the consent of the governed."

Therefore, self-rule, which we call self-government is the first sphere of authority. The more responsible an individual is with governing himself (submitting to God's authority, following his conscience), the less control he needs from external spheres. However, there are individuals who cannot govern themselves. Therefore, the Lord established other spheres of government.

The first external sphere of government is the home, which is created by God's institution of marriage. Two individuals join in marriage for their mutual benefit, not surrendering their God-given authority but submitting to one another in love. Then, when God gives them children, He delegates authority to them as parents, to exercise authority over their children, to train them to govern themselves.

Children are born without self-government and, therefore, they need direction, regulation, control, and restraint. Thus, as God designed, a child's first human authority is in the home. God delegates authority to parents and charges them with training children "in the way they should go" (*Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4*). When parents do not submit to God or train their children to obey Him, they are rebelling against His social order and are adding to the problem. It should be the goal of parents, to the glory of God and the benefit of society, to produce God-fearing, self-governed children who exhibit Christ-like character.

The second external God-ordained sphere of government is the Church. Though Christ is the Head of the Church, God delegated earthly leadership to Elders or Pastors. These leaders are charged with teaching the Scriptures (Gospel) and nurturing disciples who exhibit Christian conscience (love and fear of God), character (loving others), and self-government (obedience to God's will). When individuals join a church, they enter a covenant for mutual benefit. They are not surrendering their authority but rather submitting to leadership in love.

If the home and Church are in place, then why is the third external sphere — civil government -- necessary? God established civil government for those without self-government, those who put the lives and property of others in jeopardy. Thus, civil government exists to restrain the lawless and to protect the lawful (*Rom. 13:1-7*). In America, four levels of civil government exist – city, county, state, and the federal government. These entities protect the 99% from the one percent who cannot or will not govern themselves.

Even in civil governments, individuals retain their God-given authority. Civil government is simply an association of individuals, with God-given rights and authority, who covenant together for their mutual benefit. They do not surrender their rights as individuals but rather they submit to leadership in love. Individuals combine for collective benefits – order, lawmaking, justice, defense, record-keeping, and more. While civil government exists by God's decree, it cannot extend its authority beyond that of the individuals who established it. In other words, it would be wrong for the State to lie, steal, cheat, or murder, all of which violate God's individual mandates.

Who Has Jurisdiction?

When we recognize the spheres of government, we will understand that each sphere – individual, home, church, and state -- has responsibilities and limits. Regarding the many issues that burden societies -- education, jobs, health care, poverty, crime -- the question is who should address these issues? The answer depends on one's understanding of jurisdiction, the boundaries in which a sphere of authority can operate. It is not who can take care of or provide for something but rather who is supposed to do it?

If each sphere of government has been ordained by God with responsibilities and limits, then these issues must fall within one sphere's jurisdiction, and it would be wrong for a sphere to neglect its God-given responsibilities. Likewise, it would be wrong for one sphere to interfere with the responsibilities of another; and it would be wrong for one sphere to surrender its responsibilities to another sphere.

Therefore, regarding these issues, which sphere of government has jurisdiction? Which one has the right or authority to act? Education, for example, is the responsibility of the home, not the civil government (*Deut. 6:6-9; Eph. 6:4*). Ministering to the poor is the responsibility of the individual, the home, or the Church, but not the State (*Matt. 25:35-40; James 1:27*). Though the civil government (State) has a limited purpose, its tendency has always been to expand its control over the other spheres, therefore becoming tyrannical. The other spheres must keep the civil government (State) within its jurisdiction.

What does all of this have to do with Communism and the separation of church and state? Now that we understand a biblical view of God and government, we can easily spot the lies and dangers of the Communist worldview. In the Communist worldview, the state is god, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-controlling. Everyone and everything should belong to the State and be regulated by the State. Communists do not allow the other spheres (individual, home, church) to have jurisdiction over much, except by permission of the State. Thus, Communism is not a biblical view of the world or a God-honoring approach to society.

Likewise, as the State expands its authority over society, it absorbs the responsibilities of the other spheres – individual, home, and church. Thus, the biblical separation of church and state is being eliminated and replaced with the secular lie that the church only has authority as the State allows. While the American church has been sidelined and silenced, kept from having an influence on the issues of our society, the all-powerful State is steadily encroaching on the roles and responsibilities of the church.

Unfortunately, American Christians have fallen for the lie of the modern separation of church and state and have even bought into the softer Marxist ideas, that of progressivism, fascism, and socialism. As Christians are taken captive, the Gospel's influence is squelched, and the State will render the church more ineffective.