

# What Is the Relationship between Church and State?

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**R. C. SPROUL**



# What Is the Relationship between Church and State?

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R. C. SPROUL

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## Chapter One

# Legal Force

A few years ago, I was invited to be the keynote speaker at the inaugural prayer breakfast for the governor of Florida. At that breakfast, I addressed not only the group of people who were assembled, but also the governor himself. I said that the event was similar to an ordination service in a church. At an ordination service, a man is consecrated to the sacred ministry of the gospel and is set apart for that vocation in the church. I tried to impress upon the governor the weight of his office:

## What Is the Relationship between Church and State?

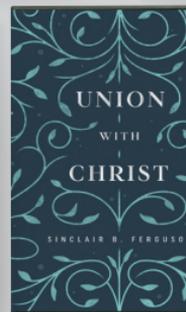
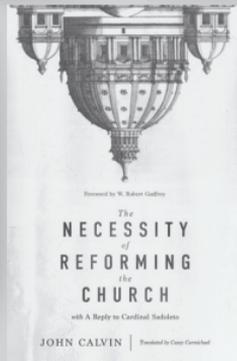
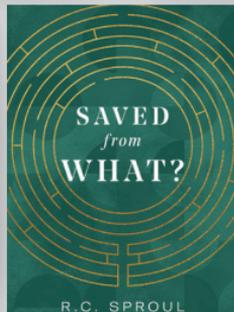
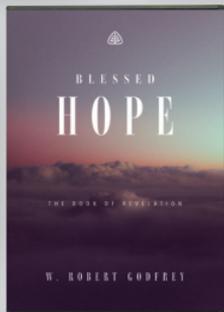
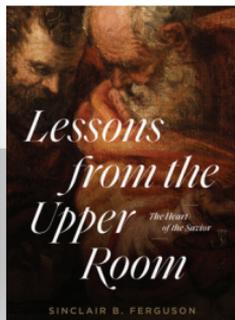
Today is your ordination day. Today is your ordination sermon, or ordination ceremony. Your office is ordained by God, just like mine is as a pastor. It is because of God's authority that there is such a thing as government. For this reason, you are called by God to be a minister, not as a preacher in a local church, but as an official of this state. However, in your office as governor, you are not given autonomous authority. Your authority, and the only authority that you have whatsoever, is an authority delegated to you by the One who possesses all authority, and that is God. Ultimately, God is the foundation of authority by which you will rule in government. I challenge you this day to always remember that you are accountable to God for how you exercise that office, and may you not be seduced by this mythological concept of separation of church and state. The state, as much as the church, is instituted by God, ordained by God, and derives whatever authority it has through the delegation of divine authority. The state, therefore, is answerable and accountable to God.

At that time, I was able to say this to the governor of our state. However, to speak in these terms today is to be a voice of one crying in the wilderness. We live in a society that has been radically secularized and where it's assumed that the civil government is not answerable to God and, in fact, has a right to be godless.

In the United States, we often hear the phrase *separation of church and state*, but it should be noted that this phrase does not occur in the country's founding documents. It is not found in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights. It comes from a remark made by Thomas Jefferson about the principles that he believed were implied in the founding documents of the United States. But it has now become perhaps the only remaining absolute in American culture: the absolute principle of the absolute separation of church and state.

From the very beginning of Christianity, the relationship between church and state has been a matter of great concern. When we look at the Old Testament, we see that Israel was a theocracy, a state that was ruled by God through anointed kings. Though the church and state had certain distinctions—including distinctions between the

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