

S T U D Y G U I D E



Church and State

by R.C. Sproul



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Legal Force

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

In Israel under the Old Covenant, church and state were intertwined in a virtual theocracy. With the coming of Christ and the sending of the church into the nations of the world under the terms of the New Covenant, Christians have been forced to face the question of the relationship between the church and the various governments under which it finds itself living. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul introduces the highly important issue of the relationship between church and state.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to state the basic definition of “government”
2. To be able to explain the fundamental origin of human government

QUOTATIONS

God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.

The princes of the people have gathered together, The people of the God of Abraham.

For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.

—Psalm 47:8–9

God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.

—Westminster Confession of Faith, XXIII:1

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. One of the most important issues to face the Christian in our day is the question of the relationship between the church and the state.
2. This relationship has been a matter of great concern to the Christian community from the very beginning of the Christian era.
3. Old Testament Israel was governed by a virtual theocracy—a state ruled by God through anointed kings.
4. In the Old Testament, the church and state were so closely integrated that to speak of separation between the two would be a mistake.
5. Once the New Testament community was established, the church moved out into all kinds of different nations with different kinds of secular governments.
6. In this new situation, the church had to face the question of how to relate to these different forms of government.

B. The Nature of Government

1. The first question we must ask involves the definition of “government” at its most elementary and foundational form.
2. We have to ask, “What is the essence of human government?”
3. That question can be answered with one word—force.
4. Government is force, but it is a force that is backed by some kind of legal structure; it is “legal force.”
5. Government is a structure that is legally endowed with the right to use force to compel its citizens to do certain things and not do other things.

C. The Origin of Government

1. The original form of government rested in the rule and authority of God Himself.
2. Before any human government was ever established, there was already government because in creation the Author of the universe gave commands to His first creatures.
3. Along with His commands, God also gave prohibitions to which were attached sanctions to be imposed if man disobeyed.
4. The first manifestation of earthly government may be seen in the angel that God placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden.
5. The angel was given an instrument of force to prevent Adam and Eve from returning to the paradise in which they were created.
6. Even before the Fall, there was an authority structure in that Adam and Eve were given dominion over the earth and its creatures.

D. A Necessary Evil?

1. Augustine considered government to be a necessary evil.
2. All governments are representative of fallen humanity because all governments are made up of fallen human beings.

3. Augustine argued that human government was not necessary before the Fall.
4. Aquinas differed with Augustine, arguing that there could still have been a place for government in an unfallen world based on the principle of the division of labor.
5. Aquinas did agree that the primary purpose of government was to restrain evil.
6. The primary purpose for which government was created in the first place was to exercise restraint upon human evil in order to preserve the very possibility of human existence.
7. Government exists to protect human life from the destructive impulses of other human beings.
8. Government also exists to protect human property from those who would violate other human beings by stealing or destroying other people's property.
9. In order to protect property, human government regulates agreements, upholds contracts, and ensures just weights and balances.
10. Government also protects the world itself, regulating how we treat animals and the environment.

E. Separation of Church and State

1. We hear much these days about the concept of the separation of church and state.
2. This phrase is found nowhere in the founding documents of the American Republic.
3. The phrase was originally found in the private correspondence of Thomas Jefferson.
4. It has become enshrined as one of the few remaining absolutes in American culture.
5. In our day, the concept does not mean the same thing it meant to Jefferson.
6. In our culture, "separation of church and state" has come to mean "separation of the state from God."
7. The church and the state do operate in different spheres, but neither operates apart from the authority of God.
8. The moment any government declares itself independent of God, it has become demonized.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Old Testament Israel was governed by a virtual _____—a state ruled by God through anointed kings.
 - a. Democracy
 - b. Oligarchy
 - c. Theocracy
 - d. Anarchy
2. Government is basically_____.
 - a. Legal force
 - b. Evil
 - c. Separate from the authority of God
 - d. All of the above

3. The first manifestation of earthly government may be seen in _____.
 - a. The covenant that God made with Noah after the flood
 - b. The angel that God placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden
 - c. The mark that God gave to Cain
 - d. The establishment of the kingdom of Israel

4. Augustine considered government to be _____.
 - a. An unnecessary evil
 - b. A necessary evil
 - c. An unmitigated good
 - d. Neither good nor evil

5. Aquinas did agree that the primary purpose of government was _____.
 - a. To levy taxes
 - b. To educate children
 - c. To regulate Christian worship
 - d. To restrain evil

6. In our culture, “separation of church and state” has come to mean _____.
 - a. Separation of the state from God
 - b. Separation of the church from accountability
 - c. Separation of the church from God
 - d. Separation of the state from law

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Genesis 1. What indications of the existence of a form of God-ordained government appear in this first chapter of the Bible? What is the nature of this early form of government?
2. Read Romans 13:1–4. What basic principles of government can be learned from this passage? What is the source of a government’s authority? Whom does the civil magistrate serve?
3. What is the basic purpose of human government, according to 1 Peter 2:13–14?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the lecture, Dr. Sproul defined “government” as essentially “legal force.” Do you agree that this definition is accurate. Why or why not?
2. According to Augustine, human government is “a necessary evil.” Do you agree with this assessment? Would there have been a place for human government if the Fall had not occurred? Explain your answer.
3. What is the legitimate meaning of the phrase “separation of church and state”? What has this phrase come to mean in our modern culture?

APPLICATION

1. Read and meditate on the principles outlined in Romans 13:1–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. Consider what these principles mean for you as an individual, and consider what they mean for the church.
2. Have you demonstrated the kind of respect toward civil government that the New Testament requires? Do you pray for those in office, those who are “God’s ministers” (Romans 13:6), according to Scripture? If not, begin to do so.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Hall, David W. *Savior or Servant?*, pp. 1–38

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