

Lesson One

A Christian Is a Member of Two Kingdoms

Civil Government, pp. 1-54

Goals

1. To understand the distinct nature and purpose of the spiritual kingdom (the church) of which we are members.
2. To understand the distinct nature and purpose of the earthly kingdom (civil government) of which we are also members.

Introduction

As Christians, we are members of two kingdoms. We are citizens in God's kingdom of grace, a spiritual kingdom where Jesus rules in our hearts with his love and forgiveness. This is the most important kingdom by far. But we are also members of what we might call "the other kingdom." Each of us belongs to a physical and earthly kingdom; we live under a civil government.

- What are some of the things you do as a member of God's kingdom?
- What are some of the things you do as a citizen living under a local government?

In this lesson we will examine how each kingdom began and why the Lord established each.

How the two kingdoms began

The origin of the spiritual kingdom, God's church

Genesis 3:6-10 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

- Describe Adam and Eve's behavior in the aftermath of the fall.
- What need did the first sin create for all humanity?

Genesis 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*

- How did God reconcile himself to Adam and Eve and the rest of the world?
- Explain the following statement: God established his kingdom of grace the moment he gave his promise of a Savior.

Genesis 4:26 *Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.*

- In what way do we see Adam and Eve and their believing children functioning as the church in Genesis 4:26?

The origin of the earthly kingdom, civil government

What form civil government may have taken if the Lord would have established it in a perfect world is open to speculation. The fact is that the world did not remain perfect.

Genesis 6:11 *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.*

- After the fall God had promised salvation from sin but did not put an end to sin itself. Sin would persist. Adam and Eve's first son, Cain, killed his brother Abel. Genesis 6:11 describes life in a world where sin and evil seemed to go almost unchecked. What do you think life must have been like at the time of the flood?

Genesis 9:6 *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.*

- The pre-flood world was one of violence and murder. How did God address that problem?

Romans 13:1,2 *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*

- To whom did God give the right and authority to punish crimes and thereby preserve outward order in the world?

2 Chronicles 20:6 *O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.*

- God founded his church (the spiritual kingdom) directly by way of the promise in Genesis 3:15. God did not establish government in that way. God allowed human government to develop over time under his guidance. 2 Chronicles 20:6 reminds us that God still guides and controls nations and their governments according to his plan for history. Think of some examples from the Bible in which God clearly ruled and directed nations and/or governments to achieve his purposes.
- Describe some times when the words of the passage (spoken by King Jehoshaphat) would be of great comfort to you.
- Describe what life would be like if God had not established either of the two kingdoms.

The purpose of each kingdom

Why God created the spiritual kingdom

Psalm 51:9-12 *Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

- King David had left God's kingdom for a time. He had sinned and refused to confess that sin. Yet he repented and came back under God's gracious rule. In the above verses, as David asks God to restore the blessings lost by David, he helps us understand the nature of God's kingdom and what it means for us. Using David's prayer, describe what it means to be a member of God's kingdom.

1 Peter 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

- What tool does God use to bring us into his kingdom and effect such a change in our lives?

Matthew 28:18-20 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

- After he defeated sin, death, and Satan, Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim his authority and extend his kingdom. In short, he gave his church her marching orders. According to this passage, what is the clear and specific purpose of the church?

Why God created civil government

1 Peter 2:13,14 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

- What is the purpose of “the other kingdom,” civil government?
- How does the government establish order and justice in a sinful world?
- Give several examples of the government “punishing” and several examples of the government “commending.”

Key Insight:

The government's purpose is to control outward behavior. It is interested in what we do (“punish those who *do* wrong” and “commend those who *do* right”). The goal of civil government is order in this world.

On the other hand, the spiritual kingdom is a matter of faith in God's grace. It is interested in inner change (a change of heart, spiritual renewal, faith). Its ultimate goal is eternal salvation.

Romans 13:3-5 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

- What tool does the government use to control outward behavior, thereby maintaining law and order?

Key Insight:

The government uses force and threats of punishment to control outward behavior.

The church uses God's Word to renew human hearts. God's Word reveals the saving love of God in Christ that creates free and willing hearts to serve God.

Romans 2:14,15 (*Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*)

God did not design the government to be a spiritual entity, so we cannot assume that civil government operates on the basis of faith in God or respect for the law revealed in God's Word. On what basis, then, does government develop the standards of right and wrong by which it governs?

- Think of some nearly universal laws that show that all nations and governments operate on the same basic premise of the natural law written in human hearts.

1 Corinthians 2:4-6 *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*

Paul contrasts the foundation of the church—the wisdom of God's Word (and particularly the gospel) that is grasped by faith—with the wisdom of this age, or human reason that is based on the law. However, human reason based on the natural law is the foundation on which the government rules, and it can serve us well. There are times when the government's use of reason will be faulty and go against the Lord's revealed will.

- Give some examples of when the government is in harmony with God's Word. Give some examples of when sinful reason leads the government to make laws that go against God's Word.
- As citizens of God's kingdom, we often enjoy harmony with our government's goals and plans. Sometimes, however, there is conflict or confusion. Give examples of each.

Summary

Through his Son, Jesus Christ, God established his kingdom of grace in which his people receive the forgiveness of sins and are kept safe from the forces of evil. God established the "other kingdom," civil government, to meet the need for order in a world inhabited by sinful people, who commit harmful acts toward others and even themselves. The purpose of civil government is to control outward behavior, using force and threats of punishment to do its work. Although both the church and the state have been established by God, they are, nevertheless, separate and distinct and must remain so.

During the week

1. Read Romans 13:1-7, which describes the nature and function of civil government. Also read Colossians 1:3-14, which describes the nature and function of the church. Note the differences between the two kingdoms, and describe how these differences are significant.
2. Read pages 47-63 of *Civil Government*.