

More on Two Kingdoms

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. I thought I'd take the opportunity in this video to answer a few of the questions that have been raised in response to my video yesterday on the subject of the two kingdoms. The first question is how do you reconcile what I understand to be your strong separation of the spiritual kingdom and conscience from the temporal kingdom with texts such as Luke 10, 16, The one who listens to you listens to me and the one who rejects you rejects me and he who rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

And in the area of civil government, Romans 13, 2, Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

How does your understanding of the relationship between spiritual and temporal kingdoms relate to these verses? Good question. The first one in Luke 10, 16 is related to Jesus sending out of the 72 to go through the towns and villages of Israel and to bring the message of the kingdom to those different places.

And as they go two by two, they are acting as the emissaries of Christ, acting as his representatives and those who are bringing his message to these places.

Now what this does not mean is that these 72 messengers have been given plenipotentiary authority to act as Christ within those communities.

[1 : 24] No, they've been given the authority to speak a particular message. They've been sent on a very specific mission and those who receive them on that mission and who receive the message that they've been given to speak are receiving Christ.

And those who do not receive them and their message are rejecting Christ. This is a very specific authority. This is an authority that does bind the conscience because it's the authority of the gospel that is preached.

This is not an authority that's just put in the hands of ministers of the gospel that they can exercise as they please. There is an authority that ministers of the gospel can enjoy in ordering the community and the worship of the people of God.

But that authority is not an authority that allows them to bind people's conscience. In this case, what we see is a very specific mission where people are directly sent by Christ with a specific message. And insofar as they are bringing that specific message and on that specific mission, to receive them is to receive Christ. But this is not something that can be expanded to all sorts of areas of their mission.

[2 : 38] It does apply to the ministers of the gospel in a broader sense. It applies in that when some minister of the gospel brings the message of Christ, to receive that minister and that message is to receive the one who sent them.

Even if they were sent in a far less direct fashion than these 72 or the 12 apostles, they are still receiving Christ in receiving the gospel message.

But this, again, is not the same thing as the sort of house rules of the church. Those house rules of the church do not come with the authority of Christ.

To receive those is not the same thing as to receive Christ. Nor to oppose them in some respect. That's not the same as rejecting Christ.

The second verse, Romans 13.2, Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. Again, what does this not mean?

[3 : 43] This is not giving absolute authority to leaders of society and leaders of churches in the temporal kingdom. These people do have authority.

And to reject that mediated and indirect authority and its proper exercise is to reject Christ, because it is a mode of Christ's rule.

Christ rules in the temporal kingdom and Christ rules in the spiritual kingdom. He rules in the spiritual kingdom directly. And he rules in the temporal kingdom in a more indirect and mediated fashion through ministers and others.

Now, does that mean that to reject any specific minister is to reject authority? Or to oppose any particular political policy is to reject authority?

No, it doesn't. What it means is something broader than that. To reject authority is a far more categorical thing than just opposing a particular leader in society or something along those lines.

[4 : 51] There is a recognition of the ordering of society and that that proper ordering involves authority. It involves people placed over us. And we need to maintain that order, that fundamental structure.

That does not mean that everyone exercising authority within that order is appropriately doing so. Nor does it mean that we are forbidden from ever speaking out against abuses of authority or from opposing authorities as they are acting in a wicked and inappropriate manner.

And so there are limits to these things on both sides. First of all, that we recognize the existence of a proper authority. And that proper authority is not final authority.

But to resist that secondary, derivative authority, that indirect and that mediated rule of Christ in the realm of the state, in the realm of church government and things like that, to resist that authority in a more categorical sense is to oppose what God has established and to set ourselves up for condemnation.

But that is not granting absolute authority. The sort of thus says the Lord authority that we'd often see associated with that in certain quarters, where there is an abusive and tyrannical form of church government.

[6 : 18] The sort of do not touch the Lord's anointed approach that you see in some quarters, where to even challenge or speak out against some of the actions of a church leader is to oppose God himself.

No, this isn't what that's teaching. And likewise with the other verse, it's a recognition of the authority that the ministers of the gospel carry. But also it needs to be held in check by an understanding of where that authority exists and where it does not exist.

And the authority of the church leader is not an absolute authority. It's not an authority in every single respect. Rather, as a minister of the gospel, they can act in a way that represents the authority of Christ in the spiritual kingdom and direct that to people's consciences.

And this is an exercise of the spiritual kingdom, but a different form of it from Christ's more direct rule. But it does bind the conscience insofar as it represents the word of Christ.

The word of Christ is addressed to the human heart. And as we respond to that, or as we don't respond to that, we are responding or not responding to Christ. And so there is a proper authority there, but it's a mediated authority.

[7 : 35] And it's an authority that's bound up with an authority that's also ordering things of the temporal kingdom in the organisation of the church, when we have our meetings, how often we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and how we go about certain forms of the liturgy.

All these sorts of things belong to the temporal kingdom. And in the preacher of the gospel, or in the elders of the church, we see a straddling of these two realms.

On the one hand, there is the preaching of the word of God, the message of Christ, to the conscience, in a way that, as it's faithfully preached, should and will bind that conscience to obedience.

On the other hand, there's a lot of the ministry of the church that is just the directing of conduct. It's a proper authority, but it's a secondary authority. It's like the authority of parents to say that you need to stay at the table until everyone has finished, or that we'll wait before we eat, we'll have to say a prayer and do a Bible reading.

Those sorts of things. Those are house rules. They are prudent and good house rules, but they do not come with the absolute authority of Christ. So, to disobey those is not the same thing as rejecting the law of Christ outright.

[9 : 00] But on the other hand, to reject the authority of your parents is to overturn the ordinance of God. And so there are ways that we relate to our parents that recognise, on the one hand, their authority is not absolute.

Their authority does not come with a, thus says the Lord. We have been told by the Lord to honour our father and mother, but to honour them as secondary authorities, not as absolute authorities that bind our conscience in the same way as the word of the Lord does.

And yet, that sense of the thus says the Lord that does bind our conscience, does not leave us free to do whatever we want when we relate to our parents.

There is an honouring of our parents and their secondary temporal earthly authority that requires submitting our conduct to their direction as children. And so, these are the sorts of balances that need to be held in play.

And within the church, you have both of those sorts of things at work. You have people who are representing, speaking in Christ's name to the people of God with words that should bind the conscience insofar as they are faithful representations of the gospel of Christ.

[10:14] But on the other hand, we have a lot of things that are just house rules, a lot of things that are temporal and contextual. The fact, and we do not need to stand and fight in every single one of these hills.

The fact that we can't find a verse to prove every single one of these things doesn't matter. There is a legitimate authority that's exercised by parents to direct the behaviour of their children, even if there's not a verse to back up every single one of these things.

Rather, it's the authority that Christ has established, the ordinance of God. And those who oppose parental authority in a more categorical sense are opposing the ordinance of God and bringing condemnation upon themselves.

But that can be true without saying that parents have an absolute authority. And so it's very much keeping things in their proper place and in check. A second question was rather disappointed on this particular issue.

There's an appeal to sapiential prudence, but it ignores the ability to decide those boundaries. For example, John Hooper's protest over vestments and the requirement to wear the surplice.

[11:23] From the Elizabethan point of view, this piece of dress was adiaphora and under two governments belonged to the magistrate. But Hooper's argument was the presence, let alone the requirement of vestments, was Judaising, an attempt to bring back Old Testament forms.

It was analogous to St. Paul and circumcision. Not saying Hooper was right, but the result was state pressure to conform, which he eventually buckled under. What precisely were the mechanisms of judgment?

The Queen's fiat will? Privy councillors? Who gets to decide, and what process facilitates this decision? This is where the two kingdoms, as the magisterial reform is understood, it breaks down into the harsh reality and the high-flying ideas.

And the idea that the governorship of the Queen of the Church is prudential is somewhat silly in the light of the long scope of English history, from wars of conquest, chattel slavery, empire, etc. It's hard to see how this form of government did anything but hinder the Church in many epochs.

Every reformed society ended up being an engine of state or commerce, fundamentally compromised. The fact that good came out of them is a sign of God's mercy and love despite cold-hearted treason, which gets down to prudential application of Presbyterian and Episcopal forms of government.

[12:39] The existence of these forms dates not to any exercise of prudence, but from your A. Duino arguments or appeals to Church as organ of state. The fact that we have them now is a consequence of it, and the claim that we decide according to prudence now seems like de facto reasoning.

The whole account seems like an account, an exercise in post-hoc, propter-hoc, self-referential reasoning. I don't mean to sound harsh, it's just that while I've found the theonomists frustrating, two kingdoms arguments always sound like they're doing acrobatics to avoid answering any questions of substance.

I agree with the concern over a sacral state or a sacerdotal ministry, but I think the Swiss Anabaptists began to prove better answers to these questions than their magisterial brother. The Church, even in institutional forms, has a different end than every other social body outside of itself and cannot operate as a mere institution, functioning to mere creational logic, but a creation proleptically envisioned in maturity.

Now there's a lot of things in this comment, and I think a lot of it arises from misunderstandings of what's being said. First of all, look at the example of John Hooper's protest over vestments.

[13 : 55] What we have in these sorts of cases is the problem of all these issues being made a matter of God's claim upon the conscience. So on the one hand, we have this idea that this idea that to wear or not wear vestments is an absolute requirement of God.

And in that sort of case, what we have is we will die on every single hill. We will have this situation where no one will actually bend on any issue.

No compromises will be made. No proper society will be ordered. There'll be anarchy because everyone has their own idea of what the absolute law of God says on every single one of these issues.

and that's the sort of danger that someone like Richard Hooker was responding to. And I'd highly recommend, yesterday I recommended the book on The Two Kingdoms by Brad Littlejohn.

And today I'll recommend his book on Richard Hooker, which is an absolutely superb introduction to Richard Hooker and deals with many of these issues in their original context.

[15 : 06] And then more recently he's been involved in modernisations of Hooker's work. So this is the first of the book, of lots of little books modernising Hooker, his laws.

And here's one particular passage that I think speaks to this problem. And this is in the modernisation. It has often been truly said that those who are otherwise the best of men are not necessarily the best men when it comes to their membership in society.

The reason for this is that the law by which we measure men's actions as moral agents is quite different from that which considers them as parts of a political body. There are many men who are very upright and commendable as individuals and yet when they are in a society with others they simply cannot perform the duties required of them.

Indeed, I am convinced that the men with whom we are striving in this case are the sort whose betters among men might scarcely be found if only they did not live among men but lived off in a wilderness on their own.

The reason that their dispositions are so ill suited to their society is because they have not understood what roles the different kinds of laws should have in their actions. If there is a question either about church government or about conformity between churches or about ceremonies, offices, powers and jurisdictions in our church they begin by framing a rule of interpretation that seems likely and whatever conclusion this yields they think themselves bound to practice.

[16 : 37] They then labour mightily to advocate this whatever any law of man decides the contrary. Thus by following the law of private reason where the law of public reason should prevail they become disturbers of the peace.

This highlights a very important issue and we think you've seen most of you have seen this play out in churches where people see every single thing as a hill to die upon.

Every single thing as a matter of divine law and that if we do not obey this particular thing if we do not have for instance the Lord's Supper every single Sunday we are disobeying the command of God.

Now there are very good reasons why we should celebrate the Lord's Supper every single Sunday but to treat that as a matter of divine law is a recipe for splitting lots of churches.

It's a recipe for the breakdown of the order of society among the people of God. And so what Hooker tries to do is to put things in their proper proportion to say okay we'll have differences over these issues but these are not absolute issues of binding the conscience to the law of God.

[17 : 46] Rather these are just matters of the proper organisation of the church and the body politic whether that's the state or the church or the family or whatever it is or your neighbourhood.

These are laws that need to be understood not as binding the conscience and so when on the other hand there's a when he talks about the queen and royal monarchy and royal government he does not treat that as an absolute thing binding the conscience as some former Tudor theologians did.

Rather it's a prudential thing something that arises from natural law and human law and it's a good thing to have it's a proper thing to have within that particular context arguably but it doesn't require the binding of the conscience and so on the one hand if you're treating this as an absolute conscience issue your conscience is bound you must stand your ground you can do no other on these all these sorts of issues of vestments on certain forms of ceremonies whatever it is if you stand your ground on every single one of these things die on every hill that makes things that are in principle matters of human law and decision and prudence and natural law and adiaphora it makes them things of absolute divine command.

What happens in many of these cases Hooker argues is that people are taking these verses and these biblical things that aren't very strong in themselves they're very best likely arguments for something and they put such incredible weight upon these things that they become absolute commands you must obey these things otherwise we're disobeying the command of God and so in the case of someone like John Hooker what you have is the idea if you wear these particular vestments you are denying the gospel now you're turning back to Judaism and all these sorts of things now that is just first of all there's a catastrophisation that you have within certain forms of churchmanship and I think that often is the case within a very sectarian legalistic fundamentalist form of Christianity where everything is treated as a matter of conscience everything is a matter of divine law and there's very little room made for prudence and just human organisation and recognising that we are members of a body of people we have proper representatives and we have to submit to house rules those house rules may not be the best they may have problems and we should debate and deliberate about them and we can argue about them but at the end we need to recognise proper authority that we live as part of a society we're not as Hooker speaks about his opponents people that would be best off living in the wilderness we have to live in a society of men and we have to get on in a society where we have fallible authorities we have limited wisdom and we don't have absolute divine commands for every single thing and so we need to just learn to get along with things that are less than perfect we have to learn to make arguments and persuade people we need to learn to reason about things and we need to use wisdom and prudence and discretion and judgement rather than thinking of these things as finding some probable biblical verse and then applying it as a divine rule to everyone having to obey this and that just leads to confusion and it leads to splitting apart into ever more fractious and vociferous groups and that's often what has happened with the church when it's taken that sort of line and on the other hand there's a deflating of the strength of the authorities that are temporal authorities so on people who would be saying against someone like

Hooker that there's an absolute divine command to obey the king in every single respect that monarchy is the absolute form that must be followed in every form of government whatever it is these sorts of absolute attempts to bind the conscience those are stopped too and so what you have is a large area of freedom that's opened up freedom from the binding of the conscience in a way that just troubles people's consciences it leads to people being unsure am I doing something that is setting me at odds with God and jeopardising my salvation simply because I'm going to a church where they wear these particular vestments am I denying the gospel or is this just a matter of being part of a human society where we do things in particular ways just so that we actually stay as a society and don't collapse into anarchy and so recognising the different forms of law the different levels of law is very important and to say that something like monarchy in England is a prudential matter and it's a prudential decision I think it's a good prudential decision in many points in history

[23 : 04] I don't think it's necessarily going to endure as such but that could be seen as a statement on two different fronts first of all it can be seen that it's fundamentally adiaphora and that there's no reason why it has to be this way by absolute divine law that binds the conscience rather it's something that is arrived at as a matter of reflecting upon natural law developing human law that's congruent with that and contextual and prudent prudential deliberations that relate to this specific situation and point in time that if monarchy arises from that as hooker argues that it does then it's a prudential thing that doesn't mean that it's a good prudential decision we can debate that we can say well it may have been better off if we'd had just the protectorship of Cromwell you can debate that if you want

I think you'd be wrong but it can be debated there's no reason why this is an absolute thing that need bind the conscience and that breaks all our differences down to size it means that okay we just need to learn to get along with some of these things we need to learn to live in a society where we do not have a perfect form where we do not and that not having a perfect form does not mean that we are condemned by God and we have we must obey God rather than men no it just means that we have limited wisdom and part of living within a system like that like living in your parents house when your parents make bad decisions sometimes your parents have laws in your household that may not be the most prudent you still submit to their authority and you submit to their authority knowing that they're not it's not coming with a thus says the Lord authority to it what they say to you you just learn to get along with it and to as you can deliberate and discuss and try

and persuade and maybe improve things but it's a way of removing so much of the weight that we put upon these petty matters matters or just secondary matters matters that end up just troubling consciences so the example of

John Hooper is a good example of that that it ends up if you tell people if you go to a church where your priest is wearing these particular vestments you're heading back to Judaism and you're denying the gospel that really troubles people's consciences and it troubles them inappropriately because it's not doing that and what Hooker and others argue against that is that these things they may be they may have their limitations they may have their problems but they're prudential they're they're matters of wisdom they're matters of the earthly temporal kingdom ruled by natural law and human reason and these sorts of things and there's tradition and all these other factors that are involved and as proper subjects of God we should submit ourselves to the rule of our society in a way that recognizes that we are conscience bound to God finally but although we are conscience bound to God we are bound in our conduct to obey the directions of our the leaders of our society in a way that is appropriate and within the limits provided by conscience conscience now there are some people who will draw those lines of conscience very tightly and that's often because they've just failed to understand the different types of law and that's why Hooker's work is so often focused upon these different types of law that we find within scripture that we find within society so there's the sort of positive laws that we find within society things like the rules of the road do those things bind your conscience in the same way as the word of God does when it talks about faith and when it talks about the resurrection and things along those lines no but should you obey them yes and if you disobey them you're rejecting the authority of the ordinance that God has set up in civil society and that does not mean that that civil society and its authority is perfect in every respect it just means that it is a secondary indirect and mediated form of

Christ's ordering of his creation for its good and so recognising these limits is a very important thing it does not solve all our problems saying something is a wisdom issue an issue of prudence or discretion does not actually solve the question of what's best to do but it does do something very important what it does is it constrains that issue it prevents it from being blown out of proportion and that's the most important thing that's going on here it's not saying that once we say that the monarchy is an issue of prudence that we've said okay the monarchy is a good thing I think the monarchy is a good thing but that's a different debate what the debate the debate here is whether monarchy is a matter of absolute divine law or whether it's just a prudential thing or whether it's something that since we have absolute divine law monarchy isn't absolute divine law we can just reject monarchy and ignore it is there a way in which we can have a mean between those two things recognising there is genuine authority that is secondary derivative mediated and indirect and yet still has authority and yet on the other hand recognising that there is an authority that binds the conscience and so we can have authorities that direct conduct without being absolute authorities and authorities that bind an authority that binds the conscience over all things and that balance really matters for actually establishing a society that works and particularly did within the situation in Puritan

England and that period of time in which Hooker and others were engaged these issues of what level of law we are dealing with can we bind the conscience these were huge questions and the whole fate of the Commonwealth depended upon getting those sort of questions right because if you get them wrong you end up with a fractious situation or a very tyrannical and oppressive situation that doesn't mean that all of these things are easily solved once we've decided that they are issues of prudence or adiaphora but it does break them down to size considerably and it means that we do not need to die on these hills in the way that we would have done before now it is true that in many of these cases forms of government church government were presented as matters of absolute divine law and that was inappropriate and hooker and others argued against that precisely for this reason that you recognise that there are prudential considerations that are taking place here these are matters of running human society and there are divine principles that form our judgement it does not mean that every single decision that's made is an appropriate one it does not mean that every single decision that's made can't be disputed and debated and all these sorts of things but it does mean that these things first of all they are not matters of absolute divine law when we have if we have a presbyterian formal government that's a prudential decision within a particular context taking certain divine principles and bringing them to bear upon that context in ways that are wise or maybe not so wise and you submit to that order when it's organised in a proper manner according to the exercise of reason as the corporate body as it binds itself by laws and as we're part of that

corporate body that's appropriate and so when there are people who make these matters of absolute divine law they're making an inappropriate move and these it's not as if all these things were decided on that basis and then at a later point we're just rationalising them on some other basis there were these arguments that made these matters of absolute law but often at the beginning whether that was presbyterian government or episcopal government these things were often just seen as matters of good prudence within a particular context and there's plenty of evidence to show that it wasn't all arguments for this is absolute divine command and then at a later secondary stage you're trying to justify those that's just not the case and so when we're dealing with these different positions on the one hand you do have the theologians who are trying to make things absolute matters of law and in many cases and to present direct divine commandments for civil punishments for issues of how to run the family how to run society how to organise your government how to approach questions of economics property all these sorts of things and they're making things absolute divine law in a way that will often and does often lead to fracturing of communities because everyone disagrees if you disagree on one jot or tittle then it becomes a matter of conscience that you're rejecting

[32 : 50] God's command and so it just leads to a very fractious situation on the other hand you can with the two kingdoms approach you can recognise secondary authorities and you can have these debates you can say can we learn anything from the old testament law that applies to our particular context now how does this relate to the Anabaptist view of the church and the idea that the argument at the end the church even in its institutional forms has a different end than every other social body outside of itself and cannot operate as a mere institution functioning to mere creational logic but a creation proleptically envisioned in maturity well yes the church is different the church is a sign of the kingdom but that sign is not the same as the thing signified excommunication is not the same thing as cutting someone off from Christ absolutely rather it is related to that it should be a proper representation of that just as the preaching of the gospel in

Luke 10 16 is seen as a representation of Christ's spiritual authority directed to the conscience so the proper running of the church as a sign of the kingdom will and should come with the force of Christ's authority addressed to the conscience but then a lot of what takes place in the church is institutional it's prudential it the fact that we have a particular sort of church organization the way that the times that we meet the ways that we celebrate the Lord's Supper so many of these things come down to the area of human law and natural law informed and enlightened by divine law in scripture but not coming with the thus says the Lord authority that the gospel does and so yes we are supposed to in the church be a sign of the kingdom and there is a difference between the church and the state in this respect this is a point I made in the last talk that there is a way in which we're straddling these two kingdoms these two forms of government and so the ministers of the gospel within the church one level they're representing the spiritual authority of Christ governance of

Christ as it addresses the conscience in so far as they are preaching truthfully and on the other hand they are secondary temporal authorities that are running the organised body of the people of God within its visible and external formal sense and so making those distinctions is very important and where those distinctions have not been drawn as they often haven't been drawn within Anabaptist context what you have is first of all a failure to properly acknowledge the temporal limited fallible authorities that exist within the state that have been established by Christ and are limited but nonetheless proper authorities and on the other hand a ramping up of the authority and escalation of the authority of the church in a way that's inappropriate that's claiming and arrogating the spiritual authority of Christ to the church and its ministers in a way that renders it apt for all sorts of spiritual and other forms of abuse and so recognising that the church is a sign of the kingdom is important it recognises that the church is not just a temporal institution like every other temporal institution institution but as a sign it is a temporal institution and it is something that's ruled by prudence by and many aspects of its governance are adiaphora we do not need to fight on all these hills we do not need to argue on the basis of a thus says the lord and an absolute demand in our conscience that if we fail to uphold a particular form of church government or vestments within the church we are denying the authority of

Christ these are problematic positions that doesn't mean that there isn't wisdom and appropriate judgement to be exercised in these sorts of cases nor does it mean that there aren't many situations where churches make the wrong choices and inappropriate judgements and governments rule in a

way that's not good that happens but we need to recognise and submit to their authority in a way that recognises the proper bounds of those authorities the proper weight of the authority but also that does not categorically overturn authority in general and so the idea of two kingdoms is very much it doesn't solve all our questions it does not tell us what you need to wear in church it does not solve the question of vestments it does not solve the question of what's the best form of government in this particular country is this a particular form of government that's just and good that's a different sort of argument but what it does is it categorises those arguments in a healthy and a way that just that prevents us from ending up fighting over everything and breaking down into ever more competitive and oppositional groups and so the two kingdoms approach is a very helpful and important one on these issues but if you think it's going to solve all your questions and all your problems then you'll be sorely disappointed it doesn't do that but yet when used properly it can do an awful lot to diminish the violence of our disputes and to establish order and peace and an ironicism within the way that we approach our differences

I hope this helps if you have any further questions please leave them in my Curious Cat account if you would like to support this and future videos please do so using my Patreon account once again I want to thank everyone who has supported me it's been such a blessing and it really makes these things possible in a way that they would not be otherwise again if you found this helpful please tell your friends and pass them on and Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow with another video God bless