

*So What?! Does Luther's Theology Still Matter?
Two Kingdoms: Faith, Politics & the Body of Christ Study Guide*

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Overview

Martin Luther believed God was indefatigably active in our world, always working for good. Luther understood God's work in the world in two distinct arenas, reflecting two dimensions of our life. When it comes to things "eternal," God is active in and through the Church to proclaim the Gospel of God's forgiveness and mercy in Christ and to assure us of our eternal salvation by grace through faith because we are children of God. When it comes to things "temporal" – that is, located in time and not eternal – God is active primarily through 1) the Family and 2) the Government. In some ways, these two categories are very similar – intended to care for the good ordering of the lives of their children/citizens – The first (family) reflects God's care for us in our private lives, and the second our public or corporate lives. Note: Luther's understanding of government was very expansive, including not only the government itself, but also schools and businesses and not-for-profits, etc., all of which, when you stop to think about it, are supported by or regulated by the government.

Luther's theology is often described by the phrase "Two Kingdoms" – "kingdom" designating the arena in which God is at work. To capture the more active sense of God's commitment to work for our good, I describe them as God's "Two Hands" – "hand" in the sense that this is the means by which God is at work for the good of the world. Luther described Church as God's "right hand" and the Family/Government as God's "left hand." For much of the church's history, it was assumed that the right hand (church) was superior to the left (family/state), which is why the Pope would crown the Emperor. But Luther insisted they were equal. The difference was not one of importance, but clarity. It is often easier to see God at work in the forgiveness of sins proclaimed on Sunday mornings than it is in the messy, sometimes contentious, but always critical work of government. Luther also believed that a) God instituted and gave authority to these institutions and b) that Christians are called to play roles in both of them via their calling (vocation) in baptism to assist God in caring for God's people and world. Luther believed that Christians are simultaneously called to support these institutions as being established by God as well as to critique them so that they would function better.

Key Passages:

1 Timothy 2:1-4

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Romans 13:1-17

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those

authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Questions for Consideration & Conversation

- 1) In what ways can you name that God cares for you and for our world through “God’s left hand”? How do you play a role in these institutions? In what ways can you advocate for those institutions to be better?
- 2) What role does Mount Olivet Church, as God’s “right hand” have in both supporting as well as critiquing the “left hand” institutions?