



# Making the Case for Christian Understanding

By Mike Winther

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The study of government is actually the study of the relationship between the governed and their governors. (I use the word governor here not in the sense of a political office, but as a generic term for one who governs; whether they govern a family, a church, or a civil state.) This concept of relationship is important because both parties in any relationship have responsibilities. Each party must know their own duties and obligations as well as those of the other party.

Just because we have no aspirations to pursue political office, we are no less obligated to understand the biblical responsibilities of political leaders. What business owner would enter into a contract without knowing the contractual responsibilities of both parties? In like manner, we need to know the responsibilities of each party in each of the God-ordained governments. Parents need to study the scriptural responsibilities of both parents and children. Wives and husbands should each read the whole of Scripture on marital roles. Church members should be well studied on the qualifications and duties of deacons and elders even if they never fill those roles. Scripture instructs all parties on all responsibilities. If we are to study the entirety of God's word, then we are to study the responsibilities of the governors as well as those of the governed.

To most modern Christians this concept seems obvious when applied to family or church government, but for some reason, we don't recognize our responsibility to make this study of civil government. This knowledge of the responsibilities and principles of civil government is absolutely essential in every system of civil government, even for believers living in a dictatorship who have no vote and no input into their civil government's decisions. If God's word teaches it, we need to know it! If understanding these principles of civil government is important to the non-voting citizen of a dictatorship, then how much more important are these principles to those of us who have input into our government?

## We don't know what we don't know

There is a profound expression that goes something like this: "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." I can assert with considerable confidence that this statement is true of every field of study and every academic discipline.

As one who teaches and writes about government, I must confess that I am inadequately studied on the subject. Each year I learn more and recognize more of my ignorance. Aside from my own quest for understanding, my largest frustration comes when I encounter Christians who believe that they have a biblical view of government and economics and see no need for further study. For most Christians, the problem goes beyond having the answers; it is more fundamental than that. The problem is that most believers don't even know the questions. Here are a few questions to challenge you:

- Are there any limits to appropriate government power? If so what are they?
- How do you decide if a proposed government action is appropriate?
- What are the biblical principles on centralization or decentralization of power?
- What are the social responsibilities of each of the God-ordained governments? Which of these responsibilities can be shared by more than one institution? Which responsibilities cannot be shared?
- From a biblical perspective, what are our rights and where do they come from?
- What are the biblical requirements for holding political office?
- Is it ever justifiable to rebel against government authority? If so, when and how?
- What economic system is consistent with God's law? Is socialism acceptable? Where does Scripture address this?
- Does a government based on biblical principle impose religious belief on unbelievers?

Most Christians will struggle to answer these questions—and for good reason. These questions have been expunged from our dialogue in the modern church. This was not always the case; many reformation teachers and colonial pastors taught on these questions from their pulpits. It was from this Bible-based teaching that our nation's great thinkers during the founding era were incubated and trained. Unfortunately, this training has been unavailable on our continent for most of two centuries.

For each of these questions, it is not enough to know the answer. We must go beyond answers to being able to justify our answers from Scripture (for the believer) and from history and logic (for the unbeliever).

Far too many well-meaning Christians seek and obtain public office without appropriate preparation on these and other important questions. Perhaps more importantly, far too many well-meaning Christians go to the ballot box without appropriate preparation on these questions. This course will answer some, but not all of these questions. Hopefully, this course will persuade the student to continue their study of these important questions beyond the duration of this course. Only then can we hope to rebuild the foundations of our society.