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Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action

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V. The moral basis of law

A. *The source of law*

Law should be the foundation of any government. Whether law is based upon moral absolutes, changing consensus, or totalitarian whim is of crucial importance. Until fairly recently, Western culture held to a notion that common law was founded upon God's revealed moral absolutes. As one legal scholar put it, "There never have been a period in which common law did not recognize Christianity as laying at its foundation." {6}

In a Christian view of government, law is based upon God's revealed commandments. Law is not based upon human opinion or sociological convention. Law is rooted in God's unchangeable character and derived from biblical principles of morality.

In humanism, humanity is the source of law. Law is merely the expression of human will or mind. Since ethics and morality are man-made, so also is law. Humanists' law is rooted in human opinion, and thus is relative and arbitrary.

2. *Rutherford and Blackstone*

Two important figures in the history of law are Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) and William Blackstone. Rutherford's *Lex Rex* written in 1644 had profound effect on British and American law. His treatise challenged the foundations of seventeenth century politics by proclaiming that law must be based upon the Bible, rather than upon the word of any man.

Up until that time, the king had been the law. The book created a great controversy because it attacked the idea of the Divine right of kings. This doctrine had held that the king or the state ruled as God's appointed regent. Thus, the king's word had been law. Rutherford properly argued from

passages such as Romans 13 that the king, as well as anyone else, was under God's law and not above it. {7}

Sir William Blackstone was an English jurist in the eighteenth century and is more famous for his *Commentaries on the Law of England* which embodied the tenets of Judeo-Christian theism. According to Blackstone, the two foundations for law are nature and revelation through the Scriptures. Blackstone believed that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom, and thus taught that God was the source of all laws. It is interesting that even the humanist Rousseau noted in his *Social Contract* that one needs someone outside the world system to provide a moral basis for law. He said, "It would take gods to give men laws."

3. *Relativism and utilitarianism*

Unfortunately, our modern legal structure has been influenced by relativism and utilitarianism, instead of moral absolutes revealed in Scripture. Relativism provides no secure basis for moral judgments. There are no firm moral absolutes upon which to build a secure legal foundation.

Utilitarianism looks merely at consequences and ignores moral principles. This legal foundation has been further eroded by the relatively recent phenomenon of sociological law. In this view, law should be based upon relative sociological standards. No discipline is more helpless without a moral foundation than law. Law is a tool, and it needs a jurisprudential foundation. Just as contractors and builders need the architect's blueprint in order to build, so also lawyers need theologians and moral philosophers to make good law. The problem is that most lawyers today are extensively trained in technique, but little in moral and legal philosophy.

4. *The loss of an understanding of human choice*

Legal justice in the Western world has been based upon a proper, biblical understanding of human nature and human choice. We hold criminals accountable for their crimes, rather than excuse their behavior as part of environmental conditioning. We also acknowledge differences between willful, premeditated acts (such as murder) and so-called crimes of passion (i.e., manslaughter) or accidents.

One of the problems in our society today is that we do not operate from assumptions of human choice. The influence of the behaviorist, the evolutionist, and the sociobiologist are quite profound. The evolutionist and sociobiologist say that human behavior is genetically determined. The behaviorist says that human behavior is environmentally determined. Where do we find free choice in a system that argues that actions are a result of heredity and environment? Free choice and personal responsibility have been diminished in the criminal justice system, due to the influence of these secular perspectives.

5. *The meaning of the loss of choice for law*

It is, therefore, not by accident that we have seen a dramatic change in our

view of criminal justice. The emphasis has moved from a view of punishment and restitution to one of rehabilitation. If our actions are governed by something external and human choice is denied, then we cannot punish someone for something they cannot control. If the influences are merely heredity and environment, then we must rehabilitate them. But such a view of human actions diminishes human dignity. If a person cannot choose, then he is merely a victim of circumstances and must become a ward of the state.

As Christians, we must take the criminal act seriously and punish human choices. While we recognize the value of rehabilitation (especially through spiritual conversion, John 3:3), we also recognize the need for punishing wrong-doing. The Old Testament provisions for punishment and restitution make more sense in light of the biblical view of human nature. Yet today, we have a justice system which promotes no-fault divorce, no-fault insurance, and continues to erode away the notion of human responsibility.

6. A Christian view of social action

A. *The loss and rebirth of social vision*

In the nineteenth century, Christians were significantly involved in social action. Many of the social movements of the time were often led by Christians. Unfortunately, conservative Christians lost this vision for social action for most of the twentieth century. Fundamentalists emphasized evangelism and personal piety often to the exclusion of social action. Evangelical leaders after World War II began to speak to the issue of social action, but only recently have evangelicals become strategically involved in social and political activities.

For decades, evangelical Christians have assumed that their theology excludes any significant emphasis on social ethics. They rightly believe that preaching the gospel is their primary task. But that does not mean that Christians should therefore neglect the social arena altogether. Evangelism and social action are intricately related. Christians are not only called to save a person's soul (James 5:20) but also to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13).

Missionaries have long understood the importance of developing a comprehensive view to reach a culture. Feeding hungry stomachs will allow missionaries to also feed hungry hearts. Preaching the gospel includes social involvement, and social reformation follows spiritual revival. Evangelism and social action are both important to the missionary task. Likewise, evangelical Christians who desire to reach a society must give due attention to the social circumstances of that society.

2. *Reasons for non-involvement*

Evangelical Christians sometimes resist focusing on the social and political circumstances of a society because they believe that social and political involvement is a worldly activity. Building roads, schools, and hospitals could also be considered a worldly activity, yet mission agencies see the importance of these activities in advancing their goal of reaching a culture

for Christ.



Christians often retreat from social and political involvement because it involves conflict and compromise. Evangelicals feel they will be forced to compromise biblical principles if they enter into the social and political arena. While it is true that there is conflict and compromise in these arenas, compromise need not take place at the level of fundamental principles. Every area of human endeavor (including church government) involves some form of compromise. Evangelical Christians must not compromise biblical principles, but they can cooperate with others to achieve a positive solution in the social, economic, or political realm. Government is under God's authority (Romans 13:1-7), and Christians must exercise their responsibility to affect change within this God-ordained institution.

Christians have also withdrawn from social and political involvement because they feel that political systems are evil and that current events are a fulfillment of prophecy. Evangelical Christians, and especially premillennial evangelicals, have developed a "psychology of eschatology." They see politics as worldly and ultimately a culmination of the Antichrist (Daniel 7:23-28, Revelation 17:9-18). Believing that the current social, economic, and political systems are headed for destruction, some evangelicals avoid any active involvement in social and political activities.

3. *Non-involvement is unbiblical.*

This fatalistic view of the world does not square with the Bible. Jesus taught that we are to occupy until He returns (Luke 19:13). While it is true that the Lord may soon return, we should not presume that He will. Although we should expectantly await His return, we must also plan for the future (Isaiah 32:8). Jesus did not set a time limit on being salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Christ's return in the future does not negate the need for us to be strategically involved now. Jesus Christ may soon return, but if He does not, then Christians have a responsibility to be socially and politically involved.

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