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How The World Works

Prayer of Illumination

O, make your Word a swift Word, passing from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip and conversation; that, as the rain returns not empty, so neither may your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given. Amen.

Text

Genesis 18:19 **ESV**

¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

Prayer

Introduction

The world runs on authority. That is to say that God has created a world that is structured, ordered, and hierarchical. Authority is not a bug, but a feature of God's Creation. Everything that exists does so in relationship with something or someone else which stands over it, governs it, directs it, gives it form and purpose. And ultimately, behind every form of earthly authority, there is the authority of the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Godly authority is good and is what makes families fruitful, societies stable, and churches faithful.

However, in a world that hates authority, that sees external imposition of authority as something inherently dangerous or as an attack on individual personhood, it is hard to find people who really take the Bible's teaching on authority seriously. When God assigns or apportions different types or levels of authority to different people or institutions, we would do well to listen, and to order our lives *according to the way reality actually is*. We live in the world God made, we should live and

order our lives according to that reality.

Ultimate authority is found in the Lord Jesus Christ who tells the disciples in Matthew 28 that ***"all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*** Note however that even here there is hierarchy: given to Christ *by whom?* By the Father. God has created a hierarchical world because there is authority and hierarchy even within the Trinity. The Father *sends* the Son, who can do nothing without the Father (John 5:30); the Son obeys the Father in everything (John 14:31); and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (John 15:26) in order to continue the work that Christ began in and through God's people (John 14:26). This shows that authority is not some aberration that we have to 'put up with' in a fallen world. Authority is an expression of who God Himself is. Hierarchy is a good thing. Authority is a good thing.

And in the actual world — the one that God made — God has ordained certain realms of authority, or *governments* that He has designed to rule in a way that glorifies Him, that orders Creation under His dominion, that blesses the nations. These governments or spheres of authority are all accountable to the One whose government will have no end. Christ is King of *kings*, every *father* on earth is named after our Great Heavenly Father, the *Church* is the bride of her husband, Christ. And there we have the three primary spheres of government. At minimum, though, there are really four: the government of the Church, the government of the State, the government of the Family, as I've mentioned, but underpinning all of these, there is *self-government*.

To put it another way, no government — be it the family, the state, or the church, works without regenerated, self-governing individuals. As I'm fond of saying, you can't build with rotten bricks. Bring a bunch of rebellious, authority-rejecting individuals together and you don't suddenly get bliss. You know this if you've been married for longer than five minutes. You thought marriage would be the solution to all your issues! But now, instead of their just being *one* sinner in the house, there are *two*! The only way *that* works is if Christ is at the centre of that marriage. So, underneath all of this talk about government and authority, the essential component that every form of higher government needs is individuals who self-govern. Individuals who have trusted in Christ as Lord, who have committed to obeying His Word in all things, who are growing in the fruits of the Spirit. Individuals who are led by the Spirit in such a way that their motivation for obedience is not merely fear of punishment from some external authority, but is love for the Lord who

has so wonderfully rescued them from sin and death.

So the foundation is self-governing people who take individual responsibility for their own lives so that they can be obedient to Christ *in*, and a blessing *to* the wider spheres of authority in which they operate. Why is this important to us? Why does this matter?

Abraham Kuyper calls these realms of authority or government *spheres of sovereignty*. He says in the book *Sphere Sovereignty*,

"Now in all of these spheres or circles [think family, state, and church] the cogwheels engage one another, and it is precisely because of the mutual interaction of these spheres that there is an emergence of that rich, many-sided, multi-formed human life; but in that life there is also the danger that one sphere may encroach upon the neighbouring sphere; thus causing a wheel to jerk and to break cog upon cog, and interfering with the progress of the whole."

Kuyper is saying that the spheres of government/authority/sovereignty are like gears in a machine. Imagine the gears in your watch, or the gears in a Lego Technic set. When each gear is in its right place, the machine works. However, when one gear grows too big, or another too small, or starts spinning at the wrong speed, or is in the wrong place, you get a broken machine. The watch stops. The gearbox no longer changes gears. You get dysfunction. And when any one gear is dysfunctional, the whole system breaks down.

Kuyper goes on to say that the

*"Sovereignty [authority] of God has been conferred upon the man-Messiah [Jesus] in the absolute sense and undivided; and that therefore **man's freedom is safe in the hands of this Son of Man, anointed to be Sovereign.**"*

Christ has been anointed to be Sovereign, to carry all authority in heaven and on earth, and from that authority He has anointed other subservient spheres of government: the family, the state, and the church, to serve Him according to His design. When the family, the state, or the church stops submitting to Christ, stops obeying Christ, then their 'gears' as it were become such that the system suffers. The world suffers. Man's *freedom* is safe in Christ, who has ordained that the world operate in such a way. When the cog of the family, of the state, or of the church ceases to function according to its design, it is that freedom that comes under attack. It is humanity's freedom that suffers.

We live in a world that is rejecting ultimate reality, and that is rejecting Christ's supreme authority. People claim to be whoever or whatever they want to be. But delusion about reality does nothing whatsoever to change reality. The reality is that Christ reigns as Sovereign over all things, and He has given human beings a task: we are to take dominion (Genesis 1:28), baptising the nations and teaching them obedience to Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). And He has given us spheres in which we are to pursue that task: the family, the state, and the church.

In our nation, the **State** has rejected Christ; King Charles has claimed to be the defender of the *faiths*, which is to say, a defender of demons, and the State is in regular disobedience to God's law in countless other ways. To name a few, the honouring of other gods; the breaking of the Sabbath; the murder of children in the womb; theft on a scale that's hard to fathom through a bloated taxation system; and much more. Note that the State is, according to Romans 13, ordained by God to carry out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. That is, the State is God's servant which wields the sword against evil in pursuit of the good of the people under its care. The State needs to turn the sword of justice on itself. The State has also become bloated, a cog that has swollen to consume everything, encroaching on other spheres of authority, taking upon itself authority that does not rightly belong to it.

In our nation, many **churches** have sadly wandered away from faithfulness by rejecting the authority structures God has imposed upon her. The ordination of women, the rejection of the biblical qualifications of eldership, the refusal to operate with a genuine plurality of elders, the appointing of bishops as a separate office to elders, all of which are downstream from a rejection of Scripture — all examples of warping the God-designed government of the Church. Further, the church too has become bloated, becoming a spiritual service provider that promises to relieve husbands and fathers of their duty to disciple their wives and children. Women's and children's ministries abound; as long as they tither, the men can go play golf.

In our nation, **families** too, have abdicated their sovereignty, their responsibilities under God. Education and welfare is given to the State. Discipleship is given to the Church. The average Christian home in our nation is a place, not of industry, not of education, not of welfare, not of discipleship, but of an ever increasing retreat into the self-medication of comfort and entertainment.

The world is not working the way it should. It is fallen after all. But we are

to pray that God's will would be done here and now. In an ever increasing way that recognises that the increase of *Christ's* government would know no end. We are to seek to evangelise and disciple the nations, especially the one we are in by proclaiming the gospel, seeing hearts transformed by that gospel, and seeing those transformed, self-governing individuals then transform the spheres of authority in which they operate.

We begin today with a brief overview of the oldest form of government in the world: the family, and the roles God has assigned to it. We only have time for some brief comments. Consider this a 'primer.' It's an introduction to an important set of ideas, but by no means an exhaustive exploration.

Family Government

Before God established the Church, before God established the State, God established the family as the primary and foundational sphere of authority. As we will come to see, the State and the Church are themselves extensions of this sphere of government. It was the elders from among the families who ruled at the State level, and it is households which make up a church.

So the family was established first. We see this in Genesis 1:26-28

Genesis 1:26–28 ESV

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In Genesis 2:18-24 we read,

Genesis 2:18–24 ESV

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever

the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Husband and wife, together in a marriage. This is the minimum requirement for a new family. But what is the family *for*? How do we ensure that the cog in Creation that is the family plays its rightful part under the Lordship of Christ? Well, we see in the Genesis text that the family is given a task: to take dominion over the earth, **working** and keeping Creation on behalf of its Creator. This is done through being **fruitful** and **multiplying**, i.e. having lots of children, and training them to do the same. We might summarise it like this: the family is the ministry of work, welfare, and education.

Work

When it comes to work, something very important to note is this: the family God has designed is primarily oriented around the *man's work*. This is an important thing that even patriarchal types like ourselves often forget. We have rightly been working to recover a view that the man needs to provide for and protect his family, that is absolutely true. But that is still a diluted view of patriarchy. It's *patriarchy lite*. Even we must resist the temptation to accidentally make the man *domestic* in his orientation. What I mean is that men must not work *merely* to provide for and to protect his family. This would effectively make man the *woman's* helper. He works in order for the home to run properly. But the Bible teaches that the man's domain is *out there*, in taking dominion, and it was that task for which God designed the woman to *help him*, not the other way around.

In the Scriptures, both men and women work. Both men and women have vocations. It's not like Christian wives are, in some sort of black and white, wooden way, just to stay at home and raise the kids. That's too simple. They must *at least* raise the kids, but Proverbs 31 paints a picture of a woman who also runs a business and increases the wealth of the

household. And Ephesians 6 tells us that men should be actively taking responsibility to see that their children are raised in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. It's not as simple as men work and women raise kids. However, the general *orientation* of the man is 'out there' in taking dominion, and the general *orientation* of the woman is in the home. When Paul tells Titus how Christian women are to live he says in Titus 2:3–5, *"3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."* In 1 Timothy 5, Paul tells Timothy that women should *"manage their households."*

Notice that this is so important that getting it wrong leads to the Word of God being reviled. In other words, when we try to live outside of the authority structures God has established, it shows that we are rejecting the Word of God. The Proverbs 31 woman is working at home and does this in such a way that releases her husband to *'sit among the elders of the land'* (verse 23). The orientation of the woman is domestic, the orientation of the man is civic.

But this all goes to show a very important biblical principle about work: it is not ultimately under the State's authority. Perhaps you've never thought about whether or not the State has the right to impose minimum wage laws? Perhaps you've never thought about whether or not the State has the right to tell employers who they can and cannot hire? We'll get on to this next week, but the State's role is *justice*, not work. It is to ensure fair weights and measures (a matter of justice), but it is not — under God — authorised to dictate how free individuals and households can work together. The State may tax you, but it should not be taxing you in order to pay for things it has no business running in the first place. Work should be an extension of the *family* government.

Health & Welfare

Now let's move on to health and welfare. This would be another area of responsibility that the State has commandeered from the family, and because the State was not designed by God to provide healthcare and welfare to everyone, it is no wonder that the tax money is high and the results are generally poor. In our culture, 'free' healthcare is assumed to be a normal right and privilege of all people. It is assumed that the State

should provide both our healthcare, and a welfare safety net for us if and when times get tough. Universal Credit, Child Benefit, Disability allowance, etc. But this is not actually the way God has designed things to work. What does the Bible actually say about health and welfare?

Briefly, it is the family — not the State — who should be the primary caregiver in the areas of health and welfare. The 'corban principle' of Mark 7 shows us that Jesus places the expectation of caring for elderly parents on the *children* of those parents, not on the State. Likewise, when writing to Timothy, Paul expects children to work to support their widowed mother (1 Timothy 5:8). Practically speaking, I think this should slow us down when considering whether or not to put elderly parents into 'care.' There are certainly some times when medically, elderly parents need professional care that cannot be supplied in the context of a home, but we live in a culture where, just like young children are sent off to be raised by others at nursery; so too the elderly are sent off to be a burden on someone else. But the Bible affirms that the responsibility of the care of parents when they are older falls to their own children.

I'm *not* saying that parents should play doctor. But I am saying that when we consider that 'work' is a part of the sovereign sphere of the family rather than the State, this all means that we should be working towards a system that has doctors offering their services *outside* of the realm of the State. Are you talking about *private* healthcare? I'm talking about non-state-controlled healthcare. Healthcare that is provided by free people in free enterprise. Should we really be talking about this in church? Yes, because the State is usurping the authority of God-ordained spheres of government. It is hurting image-bearers. It is rebellion against God and His created order. Does this mean we shouldn't use the NHS? No — you are paying for it after all. I think that at least it means that, like education, we should be working to wrestle it from the hands of the State over time.

In terms of welfare generally, it is the family, *then the Church*, not the State, which should look after those who are in need. Widows are to be looked after by their children, or if that fails, by the Church (1 Timothy 5). Ultimately, you get more of what you subsidise, and less of what you penalise. Currently, we have a system where the State claims the role of Saviour, and so comes to everyone's rescue in order to secure ever increasing authority over our lives (and votes). But this must be resisted. We must stop subsidising those who won't work. The Bible says if you won't work, you don't eat. This will allow us to have the margin in our lives financially to help those who really *can't* work.

Education

Lastly, consider education. Education, perhaps most clearly of all, is under the family, not the State. Even our current legislation in this country agrees (a rare win for our politics). The Education Act 1996 Section 7 says that it is down to the *parents* to ensure their children are provided with a suitable education. This is also what the Bible says.

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 ESV

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In other words, parents are training their children *all the time*.

Psalms 78:1–8 ESV

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! ² I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, ³ things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶ that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; ⁸ and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

It is through families that culture and faith are passed down, in an educational and discipleship process.

Ephesians 6:4 ESV

⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The discipline and instruction of the Lord means a complete cultural and worldview education.

Proverbs 1:7 ESV

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom

and instruction.

And pursuit of knowledge that is not established on the fear of the Lord is folly.

Proverbs 1:8–9 ESV

⁸ Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

Teaching and education are the responsibility of parents.

Let me put it this way: all education is discipleship. Everything a child learns either conforms to the world as God made it, or it does not. To learn about anything that has been created (i.e. the whole curriculum) without reference to the Creator is to have a deficient education.

Learning about leaves and not trees. But even more importantly, why would we allow people who hate Christ, who have rejected His Word, who are in rebellion against His authority, to then take a primary role in educating (hear: discipling) our children?

Conclusion

To conclude, the Westminster Larger Catechism summarises it clearly in Question 129. 'Superiors' here means fathers and mothers; 'inferiors' means children.

The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition The Larger Catechism
Q. 129. What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?

A. It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well, and discountenancing, reproof, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body: and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honour to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.

To preserve that authority. Protecting. Providing everything necessary for body and soul. The ministry of work, health, welfare, and education.

The next question says that a sin of superiors towards inferiors is 'careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger.' When we abdicate our responsibility as parents and give our children

over to the State, or even over to the Church, such that we are no longer active in raising our children in the way they should go, we are carelessly exposing them to danger both in body and soul.

Listen again to the text we read at the beginning, Genesis 18:19:

Genesis 18:19 ESV

¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

God chose Abraham, in order that Abraham would command his children and household to keep the way of the Lord (obeying Christ) by living in a righteous and just way, *so that* the Lord may bring to Abraham what was promised. And what was promised to Abraham? He would be a father of many nations. Through him would all the nations of the earth be blessed. In the New Testament, it is the Church that are the true children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). So the family is a building block upon which God builds everything else. It was established *first* as a sphere of sovereignty in human relations, and is foundational to the other spheres.

If we can obey God in our families, the other spheres start to change too. This is an incremental work, a leavening work, and we obey Christ in our own sphere of authority — self-government first, in order to obey God *as households/families*, which in turn change the world.