

Session #9 – *Two Kingdoms, Part 1*

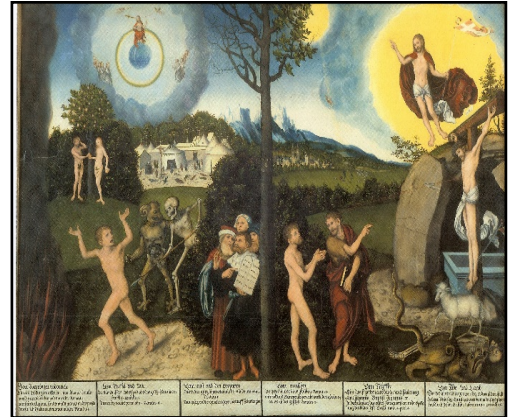
Read: Chapter 6, pp. 156-169
(note: this is the first half of the chapter)

Introduction

What is the proper relationship between a Christian and the culture they inhabit? Can we inhabit the culture and still be honoring and obedient to a holy God? How concerned should we be with being culturally relevant? Lutheran teaching brings a unique and extremely helpful viewpoint to these difficult questions in the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Opening Prayer – Collect 410 (LSB 313)

O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Law and Gospel*,
Herzogliches Museum, Gotha, Germany.

Opening Hymn – LSB 733:

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Scripture – Romans 13:1-8

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore

one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. ⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

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Quotes and Questions from Veith:

“The notion that God has both a spiritual rule and an earthly rule, each of which operates in different though related ways, frees Christians to be engaged in the secular realm without being swept away by secularism. At the same time, it prevents the secular realm from being swept away by spiritual preoccupations, as when churches try to exercise political rule. The doctrine of the two kingdoms gives a blueprint for Christian activism while safeguarding against the false promises of both secularist utopias and religious theocracies. It transfigures the Christian’s life in the world while safeguarding against worldliness... This is because, at one and the same time, the Christian lives in the world through vocation and lives in heaven through faith.” (p. 160)

- What are some ways that Christians and the church succumb to secularism, to utopianism, and to worldliness?
- How can the doctrine of the two kingdoms be a safeguard against these things?

“To be sure, Christianity and its constituent churches have profoundly influenced various cultures. And cultures are good things, part of God’s provision for human life and the locus of vocations. But strictly speaking, Christianity is supposed to be a universal, catholic faith for individual human beings from all cultures.” (p. 162)

- In what ways do we see patriotism mingled with Christianity?
- Why is this dangerous?

“Whether preaching the need to conform to society, to reform it, or separate from it, all of these options are theologies of Law, not Gospel. They reduce Christianity to rules, behavior, and codes of conduct – neglecting the fact that human beings are in such bondage to sin that they *cannot* fulfill the Law. More profoundly, they neglect the fact that Christianity is about God’s grace, the atonement of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins. Put another way, in their ambitious kingdom-building, they exhibit the theology of glory rather than the theology of the cross.” (165-166)

- Reflect on the correlation between Law and Gospel and the Two Kingdoms. How does this inform our life and decisions?

“God rules his earthly kingdom by power; He rules His spiritual kingdom by love.”

“Christians are citizens of both kingdoms. Insofar as they still live on earth, they are temporal beings, and so are members of the kingdom of the left, subject to its conditions and requirements, just like everybody else. This means that Christians are free to be active participants in their cultures, called in vocation to love and serve their neighbors through their secular roles and activities. Christians are also members of God’s eternal, spiritual kingdom of grace... (p. 168)

“Just as Christians exist in both kingdoms, so does the Church.” (p. 169)

- Many have observed that Christians and the church tend to be either ‘in and of the world’ or ‘of, but not in the world’. Why is it hard to be in, but not of, the world?

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Connections with Small Catechism:

The Lord's Prayer:

The Second Petition Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

The Fourth Petition Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

- How does the Catechism's instruction on these two petitions relate to the doctrine of the two kingdoms?
- Who rules each kingdom and how?

Conclusion

God is the Creator of both the earthly and spiritual realms, or kingdoms. He alone rules over each. The difference between them is how he rules over them. Over His earthly kingdom – the kingdom of the left hand, He rules in power by means of the Law, and calls all Christians to serve their fellow humanity through their vocations. Over His heavenly kingdom – the kingdom of the right hand, He rules in grace by means of the Gospel, and calls all humanity to believe in the saving work of Christ and thus to be saved by grace through faith. It is our unassailable certainty in the kingdom of the right hand, given by Christ in faith, that enables Christians to faithfully engage in the kingdom of the left hand. It is our confidence in Christ's work alone that enables us reject all sin as evil even while serving sinful humans in all compassion.

Closing Prayer