

Biblical Basis of Civil Government

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
HELMS SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

**A Biblical Basis for Civil Government**

Submitted to Dr. Fischer,  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

A Nation Divided? Conference  
Helms School of Government

By

Analeise E. Wasenius

February 10, 2022

## Introduction

With a Biblical Worldview in mind, the word of God applies to many if not all areas of life and it serves as a magnificent resource in the realm of American history. The God-breathed words recorded by several authors with the aid of the Holy Spirit have been found credible and reliable by historians, time and time again, and in turn, Its principles and ideologies have been referenced by philosophers and institutions around the world alike. When referring to the establishment of the United States government, a biblical basis is found in three fundamental characters that promote responsibility, authority, and accountability: the law of the land, state sovereignty, and the economy.

## Biblical Worldview

### Creation

In order to understand why government is a necessary institution in the American political system, it is important to analyze the framework of a Biblical Worldview beginning at Creation. The Holy Bible opens with “In the beginning, God created”<sup>1</sup> and proceeds to describe within the first chapter of Genesis the creative processes that went into the creation of the heavens, the earth, and all inhabitants thereof. God expresses His handiwork is good and on the seventh day He rests. The next day He creates man but finds that “it is not good that the man should be alone”<sup>2</sup>, and thus, God creates a helper for him. As this is merely providing context to properly convey the events of creation, it is important to note that all was made good by the craftsmanship of God, and it is because of this, government was not required: all authority is God’s to be given and He reigns as the sovereign ruler and ultimate authority over all of life.

### The Fall

Though all that God had made was good, this does not distract from His goodness in allowing mankind to have freewill. God gives Adam and Eve one commandment explaining to them, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”<sup>3</sup>, but such a commandment from such an omnipotent God would not suppress rising temptations within his free-willed creations. Desiring to be made wise, Eve gives in to the tempting of the serpent and eats the fruit from the tree of good and evil, proceeding to give some to her husband, Adam. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden, forever separated from God to dwell in a world now consumed by sin for all eternity.

It is here that the necessity for the institution of government is deemed imperative. A sinful world requires boundaries to preserve the ordered liberties of individuals – without it, humanity resorts to total authoritarianism or complete anarchy, both resulting in uproars of chaos.

### Redemption

However, mankind does not need to live consumed by fear because of the hope that has been given to humanity by the grace of God. The all-knowing and all-powerful God sent His son,

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1:1 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 2:18 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 2:16 (ESV)

## Biblical Basis of Civil Government

Jesus Christ, to die as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all the world. For man to put his trust in Jesus alone, will man then be allowed to enter a relationship with God again, and it is a relationship that continues even after death in God's eternal Kingdom. Nonetheless, while Earth remains, so too will sin throughout. It is important to acknowledge that because of this, government is a man-made institution appointed by God: man is inherently flawed, so all things made by man are flawed too. Thus, as stated previously, government serves as a boundary based off the laws of God that protect and preserve an individual's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (or property).

### Government Ideologies

The Founding Fathers gathered together in Philadelphia on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1787, to sign one of the greatest and most influential documents in American history known as the United States Constitution. Following the Revolutionary War, the Articles of Confederation had proven to be a major failure and was extremely ineffective: "the Confederation Congress [had] the power to make rules and request funds from the states, but it had no enforcement powers, couldn't regulate commerce, or print money"<sup>4</sup>. Such inefficiencies prompted a dire need for a new governmental structure which called forth debates concerning the ideals to be had within this new constitution. A written draft of the U.S. Constitution was formed after three months and was revised by a Committee of Detail and a Committee of Style and Arrangement in order to create "its final form, condensing 23 articles into seven"<sup>5</sup>, all in the span of 4 days.

### Law of the Land

One hotly debated issue regarding the U.S. Constitution concerns the derivation and implementation of powers. The Federalists argued in *The Federalist Papers* "that a strong government was necessary to face the nation's challenges"<sup>6</sup>, while the Anti-Federalists opposed this notion claiming that the Constitution "created a powerful central government that reminded them of the one that they had just overthrown"<sup>7</sup>. The Anti-Federalists address the stemming of such fears within *The Anti-Federalist Papers* displaying that they did not want individual's voices to be diminished by mob rule due to a lack of representation. The "Great Compromise", also known as the "Connecticut Compromise", was one of four compromises that led to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, but specifically addressed this issue of representation. The combination of the Virginia Plan and New Jersey Plan created a bicameral legislative branch in order to ensure American citizens inhabiting large or small states were being represented properly. Shortly after, an executive and judicial branch were also included, thus creating the American tripartite system seen today.

The concept of "separation of powers" was advocated earlier on by French Philosopher Montesquieu being introduced as seen through the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. A Biblical parallel to these three branches of American government can be made when analyzing the Holy Trinity. Common to how America's tripartite system works, the Holy Trinity consists of three entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: who all function as

---

<sup>4</sup> "The Constitution: How Did it Happen?" America's Founding Documents, National Archives, last modified October 7, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/how-did-it-happen>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

separate individuals but also work together in order to expand and further the Kingdom of God. The American tripartite structure uses a system called “Checks and Balances” that allows the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches to operate separately within their own unique spheres of authority but to still collaborate with one another in order to achieve progress within the United States.

The Founding Fathers designed the U.S. government to work in this fashion in order to prevent the destruction of tyranny and anarchy, thereby protecting individual liberty. In Federalist Paper No. 51, James Madison asserts, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary,”<sup>8</sup> thus, confirming that the Founding Fathers anticipated corruption in the government. The Holy Trinity provides a wonderful example of how the government should function, and it has allowed America to be a “city upon a hill” for so many years, setting an example for the governmental structures of other nations.

### State Sovereignty

The sovereignty of the states was an additional issue debated during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and it continues to be discussed today in America. With concerns over too much or too little federal government involvement in state affairs, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists were able to define the states and the federal government’s relationship through the scope of federalism. “The word ‘federal’ is derived from the Latin word *foedus*, meaning covenant, pact or treaty” and it represents both a “principle and a form of government”<sup>9</sup>. The word covenant is most symbolic within the analyzation of the Latin roots of the word “federal” as it expresses a vertical relationship rather than a horizontal one; it assumes that a higher power is in relation with the institution and “suggests a moral dimension and appeal to a higher moral source”<sup>10</sup>. An example of this covenantal relationship is portrayed by the relationship of the church to that of the state. The state and the church are in a covenantal relationship with each other because God is sovereign over them and thus, this relationship creates a triangular shape. This shape separates the church and the state onto opposite ends from one another, but as there is a vertical relationship present by the means of God’s sovereign authority over all institutions, this allows a horizontal relationship between the state and the church to occur.

Within his work, *Leviathan*, English Political Philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, supports this notion that God’s sovereign power assumes all authority over all institutions, and he claims this is due to God’s omnipotence. “The Right of [God’s] Sovereignty is Derived From His Omnipotence The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men.... is to be derived, not from his Creating them... but from his Irresistible Power”<sup>11</sup>. Hobbes asserts that God reigns over mankind because the power to do so is His alone. In a similar regard, God rules over all private and public institutions and appoints leaders to their elected positions because He knows the outcome of all situations – because of His omnipotence. Romans 13 accurately explains the omnipotence of God and its relationship to the appointment of governing officials and their

---

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton et al., *The Federalist Papers*, 234.

<sup>9</sup> “What is Federalism and Its Governmental Forms?” What is Federalism?, Center for the Study of Federalism, last modified 2022. <https://federalism.org/about/what-is-federalism/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018) 343.

governments. “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”<sup>12</sup>. The concept of appointed authority additionally expresses an acknowledgment of proper authority from God granted to proper spheres. The authority held by the state governments, granted to them by God, do not have the same authority of the federal government also granted to them by God. Here spheres of authority are introduced and imply that differing authorities are granted to their appropriate spheres. Federalism acknowledges these differing authorities by recognizing the state and the federal governments as distinguished spheres, whose authorities are solely granted by the sovereignty of God.

Just as God coordinates the state and church institutions, so too does He ordain the appointments of state and federal governing authorities and governments. God’s authority is merited by His sovereignty over all of life, thus His appointments can be trusted because of His omnipotence. Ultimately, only by the sovereignty of God can authority be granted to the state and federal governments by the means of federalism.

### Economy

A third ordeal argued amongst the Framers during the creation and revision of the Constitution was the economic structure of *laissez-faire* capitalism that has remained a prominent economic force within the United States for nearly four centuries. These ideologies greatly appealed to the Founding Fathers because of the previous economic oppression experienced under the tyrannical rule of the British government. A series of trade restrictions and acts (that included the Currency Act, the Stamp Act, and the Intolerable Acts) severely hurt the colonists’ economy and greatly constrained their individual enterprise freedoms. Having overthrown British rule in the colonies, it was now necessary to create a government that would uphold their rights that Parliament neglected, and this included their right to private property and free enterprise. “To firmly establish their economic freedom, [the colonists] needed a new government strong enough to prevent their takeover by a foreign government but not so strong as to be able to “enslave” them to a domestic despot”<sup>13</sup>. Because the Articles of Confederation did not prove effective, the U.S. Constitution was drafted and ratified, becoming the new government structure for the United States of America. This allowed economic freedom by means of the protection of private property and the practice of free enterprise to flourish.

Not only were the Framers greatly influenced by their previous experiences of economic oppression by the British government, but also by the economic theories of Adam Smith and John Locke. “[Smith] described free markets as ‘an obvious and simple system of natural liberty’”<sup>14</sup> and he believed that specializations as occupations were necessary in order to maximize the wealth of a nation: “... the division of labour, by reducing every man’s business to some one simple operation, and by making this operation the sole employment of his life,

---

<sup>12</sup> Romans 13:1 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> "Why the American Revolution Was Really an Economic Revolution". Students for Liberty, Wright, last modified July 7, 2016, <https://studentsforliberty.org/north-america/blog/why-the-american-revolution-was-really-an-economic-revolution/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Adam Smith on Capitalism and the Common Good". Econlib, Matson, last modified December 7, 2020, [https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2020/Matsoncommongood.html#\\_ftn11](https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2020/Matsoncommongood.html#_ftn11).

necessarily increased very much dexterity of the workman”<sup>15</sup>. By becoming specialized in a particular field of work, one can efficiently provide good quality services as well as save time, thus increasing the value of the work. Smith greatly advocated for a free market left alone from government interference: “This at least would be the case where things were left to follow their natural course, where there was perfect liberty...”<sup>16</sup>; and he insinuates that with free markets can there be liberty and contentment by the producer as well as the consumer.

Earlier on, he introduces the concept of private property expressing that property owners “love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce”<sup>76</sup>. He proceeds to convey the processes of cultivating the earth’s natural resources and he explains “This portion..., the price of the portion, constitutes the rent of land, and in the price of the greater part of commodities makes a third component part”<sup>17</sup>. Adam Smith’s economic philosophy regarding private property is very similar to that of John Locke’s in that it expresses the idea that the labor required to cultivate a product is what merits one’s private property. When property is taken out of the state of nature and it is no longer common, it becomes private property through the forces of labor. “For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others”<sup>18</sup>. However, it is critical that whatever is produced from society is returned to society; resources, whether natural or man-made, should be replenished to be used again so that all can have the opportunity to cultivate produce for themselves. The moment property is misused or destroyed and can no longer be cultivated or utilized by society, one has become a tyrant ruler over their property, in which they have removed the potential of others to benefit from it. In a similar context, one who takes from society but does pour back into society, they have become an economic tyrant.

The Holy Bible conveys the importance of being good stewards of what God has allowed mankind to have dominion over. Genesis 1:28 expresses God’s command for mankind to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion... over every living thing that moves on the earth”. Additionally, King Solomon conveys in his literary work Proverbs “The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied,”<sup>19</sup> which explains the utter importance of creating something out of oneself by the resources provided by God. Skills have been given to all of mankind and the specialization of such skills allow a society to cultivate and exchange goods to further maximize production and wealth.

### Conclusion

---

<sup>15</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of a Nation*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of a Nation*, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of a Nation*, 76.

<sup>18</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Prov. 13:4 (ESV)

## Biblical Basis of Civil Government

During the early construction of the American government, the Founding Fathers adopted many Biblical principles that have guided the law and policies that have translated to modern-day America. When analyzing the three fundamental principles that pertain to the duty of government through a Biblical lens, one can better understand God's design for government and its relationship with the civilians of its nation.

### **Bibliography**

- Center for the Study of Federalism. "What is Federalism and Its Governmental Forms?" What is Federalism?. Last modified 2022. <https://federalism.org/about/what-is-federalism/>.
- Constitutional Rights Foundation. *The Major Debates at the Constitutional Convention*. Vol. 25, No. 2, 2009. 2022.
- Constitutional Rights Foundation. *Adam Smith and The Wealth of Nations*. Vol. 23, No. 1, 2007. 2022.
- Hamilton, Alexander, Jay, John, and Madison, James. 2021. *The Federalist Papers*. Newburyport: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc.. Accessed February 9, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018.
- Locke, John. 1982. *Second Treatise of Government : An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government*. Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Accessed February 11, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Matson, Erik. "Adam Smith on Capitalism and the Common Good". Econlib. Last modified December 7, 2020. [https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2020/Matsoncommongood.html#\\_ftn11](https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2020/Matsoncommongood.html#_ftn11).
- National Archives. "The Constitution: How Did it Happen?" America's Founding Documents. Last modified October 7, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/how-did-it-happen>.
- National Archives. "The Constitution: How Was it Made?" America's Founding Documents. Last modified October 7, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/how-was-it-made>.
- Smith, Adam. 2000. *Wealth of Nations*. London: Electric Book Company. Accessed February 11, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Wright, Robert. "Why the American Revolution Was Really an Economic Revolution". Students for Liberty. Last modified July 7, 2016. <https://studentsforliberty.org/north-america/blog/why-the-american-revolution-was-really-an-economic-revolution/>.