

Government – part 1

Human Nature, Stewardships and Rights

Truth and Grace – part 19

August 27, 2023

DAY 1: Understanding human nature

1. To come up with a good idea of government, we have to correctly understand human nature.
2. Governments are made up of people and for people.
3. All political ideas have an underlying view of human nature.
4. The biblical view of human nature comes from understanding our God-given design and purpose. We will look at our design today, and our purpose tomorrow.
5. Our design: **humans are “image-bearers,”** meaning we are uniquely designed in God’s image (Genesis 1-2) to reflect God’s qualities.

Genesis 1:27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

6. Some characteristics of human design are: We are spiritual and moral creatures. We have free-will. We have the power of rationality and communication. We are emotional creatures, purposeful creatures, and relational in nature.
7. We are mortal, as to this life, but our soul will live forever.

This makes us incredible valuable.

It is the unshakeable anchor of our identity

Psalms 8:5 “You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.”

Matthew 18:12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

6. Our problem: **human beings are fallen.**
7. Our bent is inward, toward self, first. Our pride is the fundamental flaw in our nature that perverts and corrupts us.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

8. Putting these two human realities of our incredible value and our corrupt nature led C.S. Lewis to describe human beings “as a ruined castle.” You could see the wonder of what once was, but the castle has been left to spiders, overgrown plants, and wild animals.
9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Stewardship: our purpose, and need for government

1. God's Cultural Mandate given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 sets humanity up as the stewards of the earth.

Genesis 1:28 "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

2. A steward is responsible to manage someone else's things.

3. The Great Mandate gives human stewardship three components:

- a. Fill the earth.
- b. Subdue the earth.
- c. Rule over the earth.

4. God organized humanity into four foundational realms of human stewardship:

- a. Self
- b. Family
- c. Church, and
- d. Civil Government

5. Living out our stewardships involves three processes:

- a. Privilege: God gives us the privilege to steward and to rule over our responsibilities.
- b. Responsibility: We are to be faithful and responsible stewards to God and people.
- c. Accountability: We are accountable to God and our authorities to do rightly.

6. Stewardship is limited. We cannot usurp the stewardship of someone else—neither can government.

7. Sin is the root human problem in stewarding the earth as image-bearers.

- a. We want to take things that are not ours (usurp) and feel rationally and morally justified for doing so.
- b. We need a form of government that will protect individual stewardships from usurpation by each other but also by those in authority, including government.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Today's government "options"

1. The fundamental problem is life is our *waywardness* and *rebellion* away from God (Isaiah 53:6). If we will not govern ourselves, government must do the governing over people. We think of "self-government" as government by the people, but it originally thought of as the ability and power to govern self, thus "self-government."

2. The Bible's solution to the problem of fallen human nature is Jesus' sacrificial death to pay for our sins, and the renewal of life that God gives through His Holy Spirit. This is the ultimate solution for our problems.

3. For those who follow God's command, He works renewal in their lives.

Romans 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

4. For those who do not acknowledge God, He darkens our hearts and minds, so that we worship foolish things, follow corrupt moral ideas, and experience the awful consequences without understanding. (*Romans 1:18-32*). All too often it's not until we "hit bottom" that we see our sin.

5. Two dominant worldviews attempt to explain the human problem and solution without acknowledging God: Naturalism and Postmodernism.

a. Naturalism ("Scientism"). Our evolved world is just purposeless chaos. Genetics are the human problem. The human solution is powerful humans controlling evolution to shape "better" populations. This leads to devaluing individuals, eugenics, genocide, and atrocities like human experimentation.

→ Do you see where government would go with this view?

b. Postmodernism: Human values are socially-constructed ideas that have no basis in reality. Institutions, which perpetuate social constructs, are the source of human problems. The solution is to remove all limitations to the state so that it can perfect institutions, which in turn produce perfect people. A group with moral beliefs must exert power by "controlling the narrative" in order to make society "right." This means controlling the big ideas and stories that people hear in order to over time make them see the world as you do. If the group exerts enough power, it can lead the world into *its* version of Utopia.

→ Do you see where government could go with this view?

6. Both dominant worldviews put power groups in charge of assigning human purpose and stewardships, and they end in oppression, just like Romans 1 describes.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: The laws of nature and nature's God

God gave us two sources of help to know our individual stewardships so that we can faithfully steward and protect them.

1. **Natural Revelation:** What God has revealed about Himself and His ways in His creation give us some ideas of right and wrong.

Romans 2:14-15 "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."

a. We have a moral sense--a remnant of God's law revealed in our hearts.

b. We often "know" moral right and wrong one of two ways: First, the inward response to personal injustice, and second, the ought-ness we intuitively know to align ourselves with the moral order of the world.

c. The moral knowledge that we can agree on falls more often in the category of "ought not" rather than "ought."

2. **Supernatural Revelation:** The Word of God in the form of the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ informs our knowledge of right and wrong in greater detail.

→ These two entities make up what Sir William Blackstone, from English law, and our American framers called "the laws of nature and nature's God." This is the bedrock of our government's founding.

3. To protect individual stewardships, we create government structures that defend these "human rights."

4. Our "inalienable" human rights (our framers' terminology) are God-given, in order to address our stewardships, without government or human interference or power. Since they are God-given, they cannot be taken away or usurped by government.

5. Today, when Americans think of "rights," many think of what government owes us, like the right to health care, the right to a living wage, the right to marry as we please, the right to affordable housing, etc. These are called "positive rights."

6. But that is the opposite of how the bible lays out our stewardships, responsibilities, and the role of government. Government is meant to protect our "negative rights." We have a right to pursue our stewardships without being hampered by crime, government intrusion, the loss of a judicial system that rewards good behavior and punishes bad behavior (Rom. 13), etc.

7. When government is expected to fulfill positive rights, government automatically infringes on the rights of others to fund these.

8. Individuals are responsible to "exercise their rights," to manage their stewardships as individuals, as parents, in social, civic, and business actions.

9. Government is meant to provide a system where righteousness is rewarded on one hand, and where crime "doesn't pay" on the other.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: The American Bill of Rights

1. Our American founders drafted our Bill of Rights. It is these rights that our government is responsible to protect from harm, either from crime or from government power.
2. Civil government protects the individual as he or she exercises their rights, but the government cannot *secure results* for any person *because* that would require *violating* another person's rights.
3. "Positive rights" supporters believe that the government is responsible for securing certain outcomes or standards of living for its people.
4. Providing positive rights actually ends up *usurping*.
 - a. Usurp means to take a position illegally or by force.
 - b. Usurping was one of the big grievances that the Founders cited as valid motives for their fight for independence.

5. Jesus taught that virtue is freely-chosen in the heart. The government as a coercive entity is incompetent to enact benevolence and charity.

6. Whenever a civilization places its hopes in government, they give more and more power to government, and historically, this ends in Lord Acton's famous quote...

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority;
still more when you superadd the tendency of the certainty of corruption by authority."

7. Even though trying to get "oughts" from the Natural Moral Knowledge is nearly impossible, it is at the heart of "positive rights," and will end in "Might Makes Right." This is the very thing our first colonists were running from!

8. The Declaration of Independence refers to "negative rights" when it says "certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

- a. Biblically, freedom (liberty) is the ability to do as one ought, not only as one wants.
- b. Biblically, a happy life flows from virtuous living.

9. We cannot create a perfect society because there are no perfect people. Every attempt at perfecting humans always leads to tyranny and death. If we are to fulfill our God-given purpose and responsibilities, we need to create government and policies that protect individual, "negative" human rights.

10. For those seeking a utopia here on earth, you will find it impossible for two reasons. First, the fallen nature of man, and second, the coercive power of government (or the opposite, the abolishing of government) will bring the opposite of utopia—death, misery, and the loss of freedom.

11. What strikes you from today's devotional?