

Moses said: "Acknowledge today and take to heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

(Deuteronomy 4:39)

The law indeed was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE "TWO KINGDOMS"

"Kingdom on the Left Hand"

The Political Realm

*God's Authority
Exercised through the State*



**God's Active Power
Experienced in Creation**

used to express

Order & Restraint

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:1-2)

"Kingdom on the Right Hand"

The Spiritual Realm

*God's Authority
Exercised through the Church*



**God's Active Power
Experienced in Redemption**

used to express

Grace & Mercy

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:21-23)

Two Kingdoms Doctrine

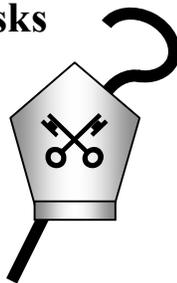
Martin Luther, and Lutherans after him, often speak of God's work in the world in terms of two realms or *kingdoms*. For those unfamiliar with the terminology, this "Two Kingdoms" doctrine may seem confusing.

Related to the theological distinction between Law and Gospel, the Two Kingdoms are understood as the rule of God in two different arenas of life. The "Kingdom on the Left" is God's power exercised in the secular realm, through law, government, and political authority. The "Kingdom on the Right" is God's power exercised in the spiritual realm, through the gospel of forgiveness and grace proclaimed by people of the Church.

Like God using his right and left hands to do his will, the authority of both kingdoms is granted from above, and they are meant to work together for the common good.

Specific God-Given Tasks

Luther argued that the Pope and Roman hierarchy of the Church in his day had forgotten their God-given task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ (the authority of the right hand kingdom), in their effort to exercise civil power (the authority of the left hand kingdom). Luther insisted that the Church was never meant to exercise civil authority, but that God had entrusted this task to princes and governors. Luther argued that civil leaders had a God-given responsibility to maintain order, enforce just laws, and serve their people under God's authority.



Jesus answered Pilate, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11)

The distinction here is not between matters that concern and do not concern God. The distinction is between the authority God gives specifically to the Church and the authority God gives specifically to the state. Both are to serve as instruments of God so that neither is lost or obscured.

Modern church leaders make this mistake when they claim that their ecclesiastical position or religious faith gives them special insight into secular political affairs. Elected leaders come from a variety of different political perspectives and goals, but the sincerity of one's faith does not necessarily make a person a good political leader.

Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes. (Psalm 119:23)

Church and State

In later centuries, the idea of “two realms of power” evolved into the concept we now know as “the separation of church and state.” However, it is important to bear in mind that this modern concept is **not** identical to Luther's doctrine of Two Kingdoms. For Luther, both church and state were under divine authority, working together like God's right and left hands.

Further Reading:

Those interested in learning more from Scripture about how God exercises his authority in two distinct kingdoms might want to read **Romans, Chapters 12 and 13**. In these chapters, the Apostle Paul describes how God works through his human servants, both in the ministry of the Church of Christ and through earthly civil authority.

For a case-study example of how these two kingdoms overlap and the tensions between them, read the story of the Apostles' confrontation with the Jewish Council, from **Acts 5:17-42**.

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God's Two Kingdoms



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What Does This Mean?

“The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.”

(Joshua 2:11 NRSV)