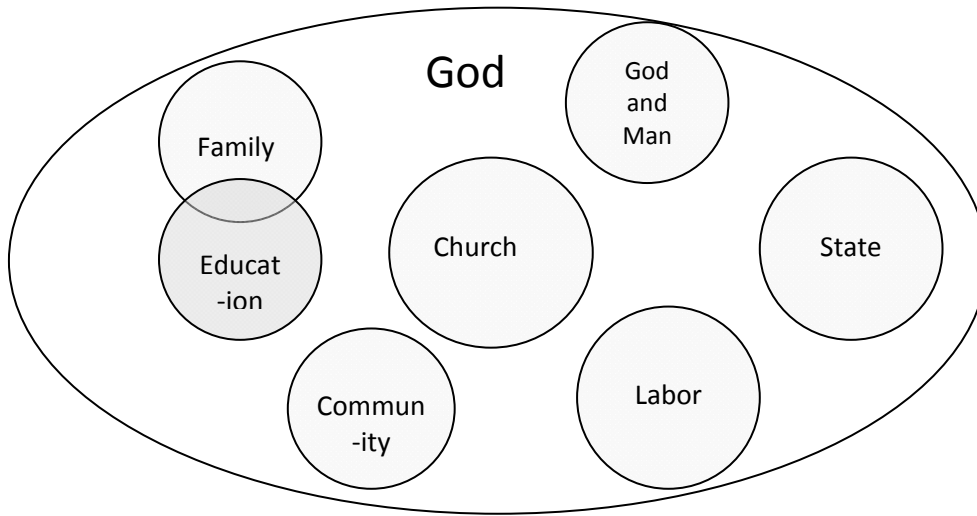


1. Sphere Sovereignty



A **social sphere** is a group that naturally develops out of the organic life of human society that has an inner principle and cultural task of their own, entrusted to them by God.

Based on H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, page 125

Sphere sovereignty is the concept that each sphere (or sector) of life has its own distinct responsibilities and authority or competence, and stands equal to other spheres of life.

“Sphere Sovereignty”, [www.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphere_sovereignty),
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphere_sovereignty accessed 3/2/10

2. Responsibilities of some of the Spheres

a. Family

With regard to the **individual** – The person is individually responsible for his own decisions within the family (Ezek 18:19-20). The individual cannot define or withdraw from this family of his own accord.

With regard to the **state** – it appears that the nuclear family no longer bears the power of the sword. The family is responsible to care and provide for one another (1 Tim. 5:8). The family is responsible for the education of children (Deut. 6:4-9). The family has the authority to and responsibility for disciplining dependant children (Prov. 10:13).

With regard to the **church** – the nuclear family ministers the gospel within itself. Families are not independent of the church, do not have a call to administer the sacraments, and function with the ministry of the church, and the home often operates as an extension of the church in the community (Acts 16:15, 31-32).

With regard to **labor** – the family is the basic institution of dominion in the earth, called to cultivate the planet (Gen. 1:26-28), and thus it is good for families to start and run businesses together. Through labor, the family is to sustain and provide for its members.

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b. The Church

The church has spiritual authority; it ministers the Word of God, administers the sacraments, holds the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19), binds and looses (Matt. 18:17-18). This is exercised primarily on a local level as well as on a regional and church wide level (Acts 15).

Leaders for the NT Church – the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, elders and deacons – "Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."" (Matthew 4:18-19; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-7).

In the ethics of the kingdom, leadership is service to another (Mark 10:42). The leadership God approves is humble leadership (1 Pet. 5:5).

Unlike the state it conquers through love and persuasion (2 Cor. 5:11), not by violence (Matt. 5:38-48; Rom. 12:9-12).

The church has responsibility for many mediating functions of the people of God. They resolve disputes (1 Cor. 5:1-6:8). As our first citizenship is in heaven, disputes with other believers are brought before the church elders. With non-Christians, we bring them to the state.

They also lead in spiritual battle (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Thess. 5:8). Where the state will defend a nation against the invasion of an enemy army, the rulers of the church lead in spiritual battle.

Sphere limits:

The church has the authority to preach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, declare its membership, and select its own leaders. Its influence should be felt in all the social spheres.

With the **individual** – it does not have authority over the conscience of the individual (Gal. 1:8-9)

With the **state** – it does not have the authority to use the sword as a judgment to evil (Matt. 26:51-52; see also 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Pet.; Eph. 6:11ff; instead it wields the sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17]). It does not have the authority to legislate or act as a judiciary in legal matters.

With **labor** – God has not called the church to start and run businesses. (John 2:16)

With the **community** – God has not called the church for the purpose of social causes.

c. State

Authority is the rightful use of power in one of the institutions God has ordained. The state's rightful use of power is the coercive power of the sword, and being so powerful, it is critical that the sword be used rightly. That is why God is in this sphere.

The state is under God but over the people.

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The State in a world without sin, men would still have needed government and some would have been recognized as supreme. This would be the perfect government – the kingdom of God. Their task would be cultural as man develops into the image of God. Still this is hard to imagine because elements that we think to be part of government would be gone (statutory laws, courts of justice, police, armies, navies, etc.)

The WCF 28.1 speaks about the common good. What components are part of the common good? There are six that are set forth in the Scriptures.

1. Maintain law and order [According in Genesis 9:6 and Rom 13:1-4]. The administration of justice.

Preservation of domestic tranquility and peace (1 Tim. 2:1-2; Jer. 29:7 – the prayer of a people within a nation).

The state in the world is a caretaker for justice until the consummation of the kingdom of God in the new heavens and the new earth.

- i. Justice as retributive (punishment) and remedial (restitution)
- ii. Impartial discrimination between the guilty and the innocent

Public justice is the social form of “love your neighbor as yourself”.

Sphere Limits

Do not identify the state with the kingdom of God.

Do not think the state and the kingdom have nothing to do with each other.

Apart from sin, the state is limited in its task to the promotion of cultural interests that concern the group as a whole, the public good, in distinction from the private spheres ordained by God (Meeter, 82).

With sin, it also has the task of administering justice among members of society, toward other states, and to the state as a whole.

The state may only enter the other spheres when conditions exist which put the well being of the state or other people in the society at risk.

d. God and Man Sphere

The church is formed of men of like conscience. There is a responsibility to persuade others to believe and it holds the keys to the kingdom to bind and loose individuals. The church does not have the authority of physical coercion, nor does it have authority to bind the conscience in indifferent matters (Rom 14), but it does have authority and responsibility to declare its doctrines and membership.

The state cannot ask a person to violate his conscience in the eyes of God. The state is never given authority over the conscience but is given responsibility for outward justice for all men in its jurisdiction. The individual can with liberty of conscience submit himself to the state in indifferent matters. He must submit to the state in matters of justice and protection of life.

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Coercion is fundamentally opposed to the dignity of man as created in God's image and is incompatible with the spiritual mission of the church. A transcendent ground, higher than the state, exists.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH WORSHIP?

Chapter XX Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

I. The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law;[1] and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin;[2] from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation;[3] as also, in their free access to God,[4] and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind.[5] All which were common also to believers under the law.[6] But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected;[7] and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace,[8] and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.[9]

1. Titus 2:14; I Thess. 1:10; Gal. 3:13
2. Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18; Rom. 6:14
3. Rom. 8:28; Psa. 119:71; II Cor. 4:15-18; I Cor. 15:54-57; Rom. 5:9; 8:1; I Thess. 1:10
4. Rom. 5:1-2
5. Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 4:6; I John 4:18
6. Gal. 3:8-9, 14; Rom. 4:6-8; I Cor. 10:3-4; Heb. 11:1-40
7. Gal. 4:1-7; 5:1; Acts 15:10-11
8. Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22
9. John 7:38-39; Acts 2:17-18; II Cor. 3:8, 13, 17-18; Jer. 31:31-34

II. **God alone is Lord of the conscience**,[10] and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or **worship**. [11] So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience:[12] and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.[13]

10. James 4:12; Rom. 14:4, 10; I Cor. 10:29
11. Acts 4:19, 5:29; I Cor. 7:22-23; Matt. 15:1-6, 9; 23:8-10; II Cor. 1:24
12. Col. 2:20-23; Gal. 1:10; 2:4-5; 4:9-10; 5:1
13. Rom. 10:17; Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11; John 4:22; Rev. 13:12, 16-17; Jer. 8:9; I Peter 3:15

III. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.[14]

14. Gal. 5:13; I Peter 2:16; II Peter 2:19; Rom. 6:15; John 8:34; Luke 1:74-75

IV. And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be

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civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God.[15] And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.[16]

15. I Peter 2:13-14, 16; Rom. 13:1-8; Heb. 13:17; I Thess. 5:12-13

16. Rom. 1:32; 16:17; I Cor. 5:1, 5, 11-13; II John 1:10-11; II Thess. 3:6, 14; I Tim. 1:19-20; 6:3-4; Titus 1:10-11, 13-14; 3:10; Matt. 18:15-17; Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20

Things to consider:

What is the difference between a scruple and something in the Law of God?

How do we handle those whose scruples are more strict than our own?

How do we handle those whose scruples are less strict than our own?

Do the Elders of the Church have the right to decide what is right for worship and everyone just needs to go along?

What if everybody in a Church is fine with something in worship but an element of worship troubles the conscience of a single individual?