

KENWOOD

BULLETIN

December 16, 2025

The Twofold Reign of Christ: A Baptist Approach to Two Kingdoms Theology

Michael Carlino¹

My work both holds and seeks to advance the presupposition that Baptists are in the best position to articulate Christ's twofold reign – universal and mediatorial – because our understanding of Christ's kingdom as his saving reign is correctly calibrated in keeping with the progressive revelation of the biblical covenants. Whereas God's covenants with man are not natural – meaning not of the created order – but are positive and thereby prescriptive, Christ's kingship over all men as mediated through the governing authorities as God's servant (Rom 13:4) is grounded in the Law of creation and “summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.”² God the Son incarnate can neither be divided in the first and second table of the Decalogue nor in the two kingdoms; rather he delegates different forms of governance to civil and ecclesial authorities. A rightly ordered church directs its members according to its eschatological, supernatural, and heavenly *telos* in Christ by the light of faith, while a rightly ordered civil government directs its citizens according to its creational, natural, and earthly *telos* under its Creator by the light of nature. Accordingly, I argue that a Baptist political theology affirming Christ's twofold kingship entails (1) a *maximalist* form of church governance – regenerate membership and congregationalism – in keeping with new covenant positive laws ordered to its supernatural or heavenly ends in Christ, and (2) a *perfectionist* form of civil governance ordered to creational, natural, and moral ends and guided by principled and prudential reasoning.³

¹ Michael R. Carlino (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Operations Director for The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the Assistant Director for the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at SBTS, and an Adjunct Professor of Christian Theology at Boyce College. He and his wife Kylie live with their two children in Clarksville, IN. He is a member of Kenwood Baptist Church where he leads the youth ministry.

² See question 46 of “The Baptist Catechism” in *Pillars of Truth for Baptist Churches* (Knightstown, IN: Particular Baptist Heritage Books, 2022), 93.

³ The term “Law of creation” used above is in keeping with the Particular Baptist Nehemiah Coxe's definition. He explains this Law “was only internal and subjective to Adam, being communicated to him with his reasonable nature and written in his heart, so that he needed no external revelation to perfect his knowledge of it. And therefore, in the history of his creation there is no other account given of it but what is comprised in this (and which is twice repeated) that he was made in the image of God. The apostle teaches us this consists in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). The sum of this law was afterward given in ten words on Mount Sinai and yet more briefly by Christ who reduced it to two great commands respecting our duty both to God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40). And this as a law and rule of righteousness is in its own nature immutable and invariable, as is the nature and will of God himself whose holiness is stamped on it and represented by it.” Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 43. Coxe is representative of the consensus in both the Reformed and

In chapters 2–4 I assess the perspectives of three influential contemporary political theorists and theologians (Stephen Wolfe, David VanDrunen, and Douglas Wilson), who adhere to distinct forms of two kingdoms theology and are Reformed paedobaptists. In chapter 5 I build upon the political theology of two fellow contemporary Baptists (Jonathan Leeman and Andrew T. Walker) for a sound approach to Christ’s twofold kingship.

Chapter Summaries

In chapter 2 I provide a response to Stephen Wolfe’s case for Christian Nationalism, in which I make a biblical-theological case for nations being a postlapsarian adventitious good, followed by a critique of Wolfe’s two kingdoms doctrine from a Baptist perspective. Then in my third chapter I interact with David VanDrunen’s political theology, critiquing his interpretation and application of the creation covenant and Noahic covenant, arguing his proposal is attenuated due to a strict bifurcation of “common” and “redemptive” activities which undermines the stability and durability of creational, natural, moral goods. Then in chapter 4 I offer a critique of Douglas Wilson’s Mere Christendom. I respond to Wilson’s interpretation of Psalm 2 by demonstrating that a proper understanding of the two ages and NT priority leads to the conclusion that Christ will not rule the nations with a rod of iron until his *Parousia* and Final judgement.⁴

Particular Baptist traditions that any universal, normative, and abiding law or principle could ultimately find either direct or indirect reference to the Decalogue. Bavinck, for example, maintains, “There are those who say [the moral] law is the law of nature, which in its essence corresponds to the Ten Commandments. The biblical basis for this view is Romans 2:15, where Paul is speaking specifically about the law of Moses and claims that gentiles have ‘the work of the law’ written on their hearts. That is what the Christian church has always thought.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, vol. 1, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 1:196. The American Baptist pastor and theologian R.B.C. Howell notes this distinction when he claims, “With these facts before us, the reasons are obvious why the whole dispensation of Moses is so often and so appropriately denominated ‘the law;’ not eminently the ‘moral law,’ but especially that law which was contained in ‘ordinances,’ and which the Savior removed, ‘...nailing it to his cross’ (Col 2:14).” R.B.C. Howell, *The Covenants* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publican Society, 1855), 100. John Gill likewise argues, “The moral law, which lies chiefly in the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, Exod. xx. 3–17. and which our Lord law has reduced, even both tables of the law, to two capital ones, love to God, and love to our neighbour, Matt. xxii. 36–40. as the apostle has reduced the commands of commands of the second table to one, that is, love—which he calls the fulfilling of the law, Rom. xiii. 9, 10. And this law, to love God and our neighbour, is binding on every man, and is eternal, and remains invariable and unalterable.” John Gill, *Body of Divinity* (Atlanta, GA: Turner Lassetter, 1965), 369.

⁴ Regarding ecclesiology, my critiques of Wolfe, VanDrunen, and Wilson can be summarized as follows. *Contra* Wolfe: Baptists do not find a Christian prince or the civil government to be in the prime position to bring about great renewal and repel heresy. Instead, it is the local church under its God given and gifted membership to whom the regulation and sustaining of pure worship is found. Perhaps Wolfe has such low expectations for the role the church can play in societal renewal and in the preservation of pure worship because his ecclesiology inherently merges the church and the world. *Contra* VanDrunen: Baptists do not allow membership in the Abrahamic covenant to determine or influence the nature of new covenant membership. Instead, we conclude that the clear precepts and pattern as it pertains to the keys, ordinances, and structure of Christ’s community precludes the inclusion of the believers’ biological children in the new covenant promises of God. Perhaps VanDrunen’s strong emphasis on the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant with the new covenant—such as the inclusion of the children of believers in baptism and membership and the sojourner and exile theme—drives the low expectations he has for the influence of both civil governments and the church in the world. *Contra* Wilson: Baptists insist there

My focus in chapter 5 turns to Baptists and the twofold reign of Christ. First, I define and explain the crucial distinctions between creation and covenant, natural and positive law, and natural and instituted religion. These distinctions are foundational for properly understanding how Christ reigns over all men as Creator and only some men—his church—as Redeemer. Moreover, the Baptist distinctive that positive laws are strictly regulated by the precepts given by God in keeping with their precise covenantal stipulations is built out to advance a case for a regenerate and congregationalist local church in keeping with the biblical teaching on the new covenant. This focus defends the first half of my thesis—a Baptist political theology affirms a maximalist form of church governance as regenerate membership and congregationalism in keeping with new covenant positive laws ordered to its supernatural/heavenly ends in Christ.

To advance a Baptist political theology as it pertains to the civil government in keeping with the second half of my thesis, I build upon the writings of two leading contemporary Baptists, Jonathan Leeman and Andrew T. Walker. Leeman and Walker have distinct emphases which correspond well in developing a sound understanding of Christ's twofold kingship as the biblical-theological methodology of Leeman inflected toward ecclesiology with the systematic-philosophical categories promoted by Walker inflected toward ethics and public policy combine for a robust political theology. While I agree with much of Leeman's "Noahic protectionism," I propose that protectionism is not enough for providing a sufficient account of the scope of the civil government's legitimate exercise of power.

In agreement with Walker, I lay a biblical-theological framework for understanding natural law and/or general revelation as ontologically and epistemologically preceding special revelation, such that moral goods in keeping with moral law are binding on all men. My proposal provides a more robust conception of the common good—and the civil government's role in directing society toward such goods—than is found in either VanDrunen's or Leeman's Noahic protectionism. I argue that civil governments are ordained to exercise prudence as they direct society toward its natural ends—both negatively in the form of proportional retribution for evil conduct, *and* positively in the form of commending that which is good unto human flourishing—in keeping with the Law of creation.⁵ In this way I properly uphold the doctrine of

is no such thing as a "new covenant breaker." Instead, since the very nature of the arrangement is unbreakable, the removal of members from the local church is confirming the judgment of heaven that such a one is a kingdom traitor and was never "of us" (1 John 2:19).

⁵ I am distinguishing in this work between "perfectionism" and "maximalism." Fellow Baptist Jonathan Leeman does not make such a distinction, as he seems to consider these words as synonyms that are covenantal in nature: "Maximalist, perfectionist form of justice, of the kind God required of old covenant Israel or to be declared by the new covenant church: 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48). Government is not tasked with adjudicating the entirety of God's law. Rather it is to pursue a narrowly defined or perfectionist form of justice.'" See "Baptists in Babylon: On the Role of Politics in Modern Baptist Life," in *Political Theology*, ed. Thomas S. Kidd, Paul D. Miller, and Andrew T. Walker (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 508. First, by perfectionist I mean to communicate that under Christ the King civil governments as God's servant are called to order society toward substantive moral goods and objective truths in keeping with the laws of creation/nature in which its *telos* is found. By maximalist in reference to the church, I am in agreement with Leeman, that the church is given the keys to the kingdom and thereby is called by God to confirm the judgments of heaven regarding kingdom membership in keeping with its heavenly *telos*; and maximalism also typically includes the notion of high

the two kingdoms or of Christ's twofold kingship. Thus, we have a firm foundation for Christ's Lordship over his church as mediated through the regenerate churches to whom he gives the keys of the kingdom; and we also have a robust framework for Christ's universal reign as mediated through the civil authorities he ordains in keeping with the Law of creation.

civic participation and standards for membership, which are appropriate for a Baptist ecclesiology in view of congregationalism and regenerate church membership. Second, by including maximalist and perfectionist under old and new covenant structures as Leeman does in the quote above, he is confusing perfective natural ends with perfective/maximalist covenantal ends.