

Introduction

We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.
– John Winthrop, from his sermon “A Model of Christian Charity,”
given in 1630 to those who were about to establish the
Massachusetts Bay colony

When Governor John Winthrop led his small band of settlers to the shores of America, he understood that the entire world would be watching the outcome of this experiment in the wilderness. As it has turned out, it was not just the people of that generation who watched. For almost four hundred years, the world has studied the American experiment in governing. In many ways it has been a source of inspiration for learning how humans can live together in a civil society in peace and harmony.

It is our purpose in **Exploring Government** to educate, to inspire, and sometimes to warn you concerning the governments of the United States, the individual states, and our local communities. Special emphasis is placed on the Biblical basis for government and on understanding the U.S. Constitution. We hope that you will come to understand the background, basis, and operation of American government on all levels. We hope that you will remain prayerful, thoughtful, informed, and involved with regard to government throughout your life. We also hope that you will be a better Christian and a better citizen as a result of studying this material.

The curriculum has three parts: a 75-lesson text; a volume of historic documents, essays, speeches that are to be read in conjunction with the lessons; and a study guide with questions over the lessons and readings, quizzes, and exams. By working through the entire curriculum, we believe that you will gain a good understanding of the purpose and function of government.

We include historical information on government before the founding of the United States in 1776 and the formulation of the Constitution in 1787. Our purpose in doing this is to help you understand not only *what* government does but *why* our government came to be the way it is and *why* it does what it does. Ideas and events have causes. The American system did not just appear, nor was it inevitable. We have to understand *why* in order to understand *what* and *how*. When you understand why things happen (1) you learn something; (2) you are better able to discuss the subject with others, some of whom may not share your assumptions; and (3) you will be better able to bring about changes that need to take place.

We need to make two distinctions to help you understand what we present in the curriculum. First, there is a difference between government and politics. Government is not the same as politics and elections, although governments are formed by the political process and people in government can be and often are very political in their actions. Politics involves the electoral process, political parties, and trying to persuade voters about candidates and

issues. Government officials often make decisions based on the political impact that those decisions will have (that is, how popular they will be with voters), not on whether the decisions are the best ones to make. Government, on the other hand, involves defending the nation, building roads, operating schools, collecting taxes, and other activities. Since politics and government are two different functions, this explains why sometimes politicians who win elections aren't good at governing and why the best government workers are not necessarily concerned about politics.

Second, we need to understand the difference between what *is* and what *should be*. The Bible sets forth what government should be. The U.S. Constitution, state constitutions, and local laws have established how things should operate in our country. However, centuries of history show us that government does not always do what it should do. For example, black Americans for many years did not have the equal protection under the law that is promised in the Constitution. What existed was not what should have existed. Also, the federal government has in recent decades taken oversight of areas that were originally reserved to the states. It is not what should be, but it is nonetheless what is happening. When we describe what government does today, we do not mean to say that everything it does is right and what it should be doing. We try to point out discrepancies we see between what the founding documents say and what government actually does.

God, the Creator of government, has given us a wonderful system of government in our country. It has provided the most personal freedom and the best economic opportunity for the most people of any government in history, with the exception of the government that God gave to Israel in the Old Testament. Our government deserves our respect, our involvement, and our prayers.

At the same time, our governments (local, state, and national) have not always been the city upon a hill that they should have been. Sometimes what American governments have done has been embarrassing and wrong. Still, we have always been on the hill: able to be seen and judged by ourselves and by the citizens of the world. We should help our country to be an example of truth, love, righteousness, and compassion.

I want to express a special thanks to my daughter Mary Evelyn for her excellent graphic design of the cover and contents and to my daughter Bethany for her help in editing the text. I appreciate my family's support, encouragement, and assistance for this project.

Those of us who follow the Lord are citizens of the kingdom of God even as we live as citizens of the country in which He has placed us. God has already assured us that His kingdom will win in the end, regardless of the form that human governments take. May God bless us in doing good for His glory.

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How to Use This Curriculum

Exploring Government is designed as a one-semester high school course that provides a half-credit in Government. Each unit is intended to be studied for one week. With 75 lessons, the material can be completed in one semester even with field trips, testing days, and other activities.

What the student is to do each day and each week is clearly outlined. The Unit Introduction page gives a brief overview of the unit, the lessons in that unit, and a suggestion for an activity that is relevant to that unit. Most of these activities are writing ideas, but some take a different form. The activities are designed to help the student think about and interact with the ideas that he or she is studying. For the most part it will be best to do the activity toward the end of the unit.

The readings from the accompanying document book, **We Hold These Truths**, are assigned at the end of lessons, except that, when studying the Constitution, the student should read the relevant portion of that document before studying the lesson.

The optional Quiz and Exam Book provides review questions over the lessons and readings; a multiple-choice quiz at the end of each unit; three short-answer exams, each of which covers five units; and the answer key to all of these exercises.

You should plan to allow one hour per day to complete a lesson, although using the Quiz and Exam book and doing the activities might add a bit more time to that total.