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8/6/93

<Stealing By Government>

Is it possible for government to commit the sin of theft? Some have argued that taxation beyond a minimal level amounts to theft. Rousas Rushdoony and Gary North, for example, argue that government should never require more than 10% of its citizens' income. To require more, they argue, is to require more than God demands for Himself; and that is to claim a higher authority than God. I do not believe that argument is sound. It is a little like arguing that since God reserves one day in seven exclusively for himself, no employer may ever require employees to work more than one day a week. The fact is that Scripture never establishes a maximum amount of taxation.

It does enumerate, at least in general terms, the duties of government. When government takes on additional responsibilities, it must pay for them. But in that case, certainly government is guilty of various sins including theft. What are those responsibilities? Certainly "bearing the sword" to remove external and internal threats to life and liberty. But on my view that the state is the government of our extended family in Adam, one cannot simply restrict government to that function. Nor can we entirely exclude a government role in welfare, though government involvement in that sector is perilous (see earlier essays). So the question of how much in taxes government legitimately needs does not have a precise answer.

I do agree, however, with another argument of North, that when government inflates currency to pay for its policies it runs afoul of biblical commands concerning fair weights and measures. God wants society to have constant and dependable standards of economic value. When the value of the dollar fluctuates at government whim, individual economic planning is crippled, and savings are shriveled up. I also believe that anti-family taxation, such as property taxes and inheritance taxes are wrong. God has ordained the family as the major "welfare" organization of society. When government presumes to supplant that role, it undermines something very precious to God and to his people.