

What is the Government of God?

What is the Government of God, or more to the point for us today, what constitutes the Government of God in the church, and how does it work?

Before these questions can be answered, an acknowledgement must be made as to what is the most central truth of God. What has man been created for? The answer to this question is tied to that most wonderful truth with which God has blessed His church, and the very answers to that great “why” lie therein. Why do we live? What is the purpose of our existence? All we see in this world is death as the end product of this life, which is what the academics of great educational systems teach. For them life is an accident with death as a consequence.

The religions of this world teach that death culminates in a do-nothing existence of an immortal soul in heaven (the beatific vision). The truth is that the Great Creating God is bringing about His family. *Rom. 8:12-15, “Therefore brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body (lawlessness), you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption (Sonship) by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.”*

These words strike to the heart of our human existence: Father – my Father, or Daddy Father. This is an Aramaic term of address, a personal term of true relationship. This true relationship of fatherhood is telling us that we are His offspring. He is not reproducing dogs or cats, or ever living souls, but SONS; and these sons mirror His own existence.

We find this term “Abba Father” used three times in the New Testament. Christ, the obedient Son, reaches out to His Father with tears, using this term of supplication at the most critical time of His physical life. In Mark 14:36, *“And He said, ‘Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’”* This is a perfect poignant picture of a Father and Son facing a critical time for them and their plan of creation.

As noted in Rom. 8:15 Paul shows that we have the right to cry out to our Father, just as Christ did. The third place the term is used is in Gal. 4:6, *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of His son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba Father!’”* Again this shows the Father and Son in the process of creating a family, demonstrating that we can cry out to our Father as His first-born Son did.

THE CREATION OF GOD’S FAMILY HOLDS THE SECRET TO HIS GOVERNMENT

If we are to understand this truth, it is necessary to understand how God is creating His family, which is tied to the most central element of that plan.

Every family is composed of individuals, so it is the development of the individual that is key. The family cannot live in peace or happiness unless each individual has his mind developed to live in a harmonious way.

When unfolding all the layers surrounding this core question, we find that Herbert W. Armstrong stated the answer succinctly in his book MYSTERY OF THE AGES (page 69 in the hard cover, and page 58 in the soft bound.)

Quote: “But there was one super-important quality that even God’s creative powers could not create instantly by fiat—the same perfect, holy, righteous CHARACTER inherent in both God and the Word!

This kind of character must be DEVELOPED, by the CHOICE and the INTENT of the one in whom it comes to exist.

So mark well this super-vital truism—that perfect, holy and righteous CHARACTER is the supreme feat of accomplishment possible for Almighty God the Creator—it is also the means to His ultimate supreme PURPOSE! His final objective!

But HOW?

I repeat, such perfect character must be DEVELOPED. It requires the free choice and decision of the separate entity in whom it is to be created. But, further, even then it must be instilled by and from the Holy God who, only, has such righteous character to endow.”

GOD’S TWO-PART PROGRAM

This primary goal that God has set is composed of two parts. The first part tells us what is to be done—the creation of righteous character. Second is how this is to be accomplished—through free choice.

God, by choice, has made man a free moral agent. That is, we were created as independent beings, having the ability to think, to plan, to build, to solve problems of great complexity, unlimited, to choose right from wrong, and therein lies the great secret (mystery?). With few exceptions God has allowed man to do his own thing, and man has written a terrible record of destruction, torture, and death. The very record of man’s history (war with its destruction, famine and disease) proves that he was given free choice, even if it meant making the wrong choice.

The statement by God about Abraham in Gen. 22:12, “*Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me,*” is the factual demonstration of this principle. In fact, God tested Abraham with something more dear to him than his own life, that of his son’s life, requiring him to make the most difficult

choice of his existence. He was put in a position of choice: to follow God's instructions or the dictates of his own heart to preserve the life of his son. When he took up the knife to sacrifice his son, Abraham proved to God that his choice was to follow Him in unbending faith.

How is this at work within the church, and how does it affect that government?

Becoming a part of the Body (the church) is not our own choice. This decision is made independent of us. John 6:44, "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*" Verse 65, "*And He said, 'Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.'*" In John 15:16 we read, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.*" The apostles James and Paul breathe more life into this understanding. James 1:17-18, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of light, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He Brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*"

Eph. 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." (The Father)

When considering these scriptures it is hard to see free choice. If the Father calls one and gives them faith, how can this be free choice? That is a correct understanding. At this point there is no choice on our part; but from there forward choice plays a fundamental part.

FREE CHOICE EXPLAINED

Here is the explanation. A child left on his own could conceivably grasp the fundamentals of mathematics; that is, to add and subtract, but without a teacher it would be utterly impossible to learn an existing language. Learning the truth of God is much like learning an existing language. The individual must have the desire to learn and a teacher to instruct. The Father chooses the ones to be called. This is very carefully done, that none should fail. I Tim. 2:3-4, "*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*"

The Father does two things when calling. First He gives us a desire to know why we live—why we walk this Earth. Secondly He starts the process of understanding His way of life. He opens our minds to comprehend what is in His word, the Bible. Like a child learning a language.

Wouldn't everyone just understand this truth by reading? After all, they only need to pick up the Bible and read it. Jesus tells us in Matt. 13:11, "*Because it has been given*

unto you” (the called of God) “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given..” But to the rest it is given in parables, that “...seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.”

The fact that the vast majority of this world does not understand what God is about demonstrates that it is a mystery unless revealed. You can go to the religious authorities of this world and they will not be able to tell you what God is doing or why. The human mind must be opened to understand.

Paul uses this word “mystery,” which means hidden or secret truths, twenty times in six of his letters, and John uses it four times in the book of Revelation.

Eph. 1:3-5 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,.....(verse 9,)... having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,.....”

These scriptures show that the Father’s plan from the very beginning was to call some to become holy, as He is holy. To become sons by Christ, because it was His will. He made known to us the mysteries of His will. (He opens our minds to understand truth.)

But what do we mean by righteous character?

From MYSTERY OF THE AGES, page 58 (soft bound), “Perfect, holy, and righteous character is the ability in such separate entity to come to discern the true and right way from the false, to make voluntarily a full and unconditional surrender to God and His perfect way—to yield to be *conquered* by God---to determine even against temptation or self-desire, to *live* and to *do* the right. And even then such holy character is the gift of God. It comes by yielding to God to instill HIS LAW (God’s right way of life) within the entity whoso decides and wills.”

The foundation scripture for this statement by Mr. Armstrong is Matt. 5:48, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Luke 6:36-40, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” And, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” Eph. 4:13, “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” Heb. 1:3, “Who (Christ) being the brightness of His (The Father’s) glory and the express image of His (the Father’s) person....”

In a sermon given by Mr. Armstrong on Dec. 17, 1983, entitled MISSION OF THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH ERA, he made the following statement: “Now God’s

purpose was to reproduce Himself. To reproduce Himself. But God is, first of all a PERFECT SPIRITUAL RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER! And man could not be made God until the very CHARACTER of God had been implanted within him. And it couldn't be character unless the man himself made the choice to receive it. And unless it came with the man's, not only consent, but by his own will even. And yet it had to come from God, and God would give it to him, but a man had to make the decision and want it. And the same thing faces all of us today."

As shown in Hebrews, Christ was an exact reflection of the Father. If the Father had walked the earth He would have reacted exactly as Christ did in the same circumstances.

The Father's approval of Christ is first recorded in Mark 1:11, "*Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'*" Christ's confirmation is seen in John 15:10. "*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.*" God's commandments are a reflection of His love.

It is self-evident from the scriptures that developing God's character through free choice by the individual is the prime directive of the Father. Therefore, **ALL OTHER BELIEFS AND DOCTRINES MUST BE IN SUBJECTION TO THIS CENTRAL TRUTH.** Many truths of God's word are followed to some extent by those who claim to represent the Father and Christ. Mr. Tkach, after Mr. Armstrong died, made a list of 18 truths that he felt were restored by Mr. Armstrong. Conspicuously absent from this list is God's prime directive. Yet in Mr. Armstrong's sermon of 12-17-1980 (quoted above), in which he summarizes what truths he restored, his starting point was the creation of Godly character through free choice. If anyone would emphasize any of these 18 subjective truths, making it the shining light that leads to eternal life in the Kingdom of God they would lose their direction. If one of the 18 truths listed by Joe Tkach, such as *government*, takes the place of God's prime directive – character through free moral agency, or if the prime directive is dropped altogether, as was done on the list of 18 truths, **one can and will be led astray**, which was aptly demonstrated by the total collapse of the Worldwide Church of God. None of the churches of this world understand this truth, which explains the total confusion of their conflicting beliefs.

As government is the subject of this writing, it can easily be understood that the carrying out of "top down" government that would twist these truths to gain control over the Body of Christ would not facilitate God's purpose for mankind.

If God's church and ministry were shown how all truth stems from this elemental truth of God creating righteous character in us, it would go a long way in bringing conformity and clarity to what and how God's word is to be taught; how God's government is to work, and how every decision is to be made. It would act as a homing beacon, and the church would never get off track. It would bring a degree of unity that has not been seen since the death of Mr. Armstrong. It is the perfect measuring rod for what and how things are to be taught, and for what and how things are to be done.

This is something that cannot just be mouthed, but must be the star that leads the body to truth.

GOVERNMENT IS NOT EVERYTHING

Government in the church is important – but it is NOT EVERYTHING! It has its place as one of the tools used to reach the ultimate goal. It is needful to understand that government is an action word – a verb with the following definition from the Oxford English Dictionary (1981).

#1 – (see senses of the word) a.) The action of ruling; continuous exercise of authority over the action of subjects or inferiors; authoritative direction; or regulation; control, rule. b.) the action of ruling and direction of the affairs of state; political rule and administration.

When it is understood that government is the implementation of something, i.e., putting into action, it is easier to grasp its place in God's plan. If government is the carrying out of action, then that action must be controlled or chaos results.

In the history of the past 100 years we have witnessed unspeakable atrocities carried out by “top down” governments without controls. Hitler's Third Reich, Stalin's Communist Russia, Idi Amin's Uganda, and Mao Tse Tung's China are all examples of government in action from the top down without control. This horrible result is the true picture of what happens when man decides what is best for man on his own intellect, outside of the principles of God's way of life.

WHAT CONTROLS GOD'S GOVERNMENT?

It then follows that the government within the Body of Christ, as carried out by men, must be controlled. But how? **GOD'S LAW CONTROLS GOD'S GOVERNMENT!** Therefore, the spiritual law is superior to government, and the law becomes everything. Why? Because it is the reflection of God. It is His character. **Without control by the law government runs amok.**

Mr. Armstrong makes the following statements in MYSTERY OF THE AGES: “The very fact of law presupposes GOVERNMENT. Government is the administration and enforcement of law by one in authority. This necessitates authoritative leadership – one in command. (Pg. 48-49)

Bear in mind that the government of God is based on the LAW of God, which is the way of life of out flowing LOVE, cooperation, concern for the good of the governed. And this law of God produces peace, happiness, cooperation through obedience. (Pg. 50)

Satan has deceived the entire world in regard to the very nature of who and what God is – as well as of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Also of the GOVERNMENT OF GOD,

based on the spiritual LAW OF GOD. And further, of what and why man is, what salvation is, how it is received, what is the true gospel, what and why the church is, and what of the future! (Pg 54)

But doctrinally, remember what the church is called to restore – the kingdom, government, and the character of God. What was taken away? God’s law, the foundation of His government and the very essence of God’s character and divine life.” (Pg 273)

God has given us the LAW for the protection of every person under that government. Government run under God’s Law is never intrusive. This is why David was so enamored with the Law. He loved it because he understood its deepest ramifications. Life without the character of God’s Laws would not be worth living.

When we look for this government structure and its operation in the New Testament, it is not readily apparent. However it is certainly there. God did not leave us to flounder around with experimentation regarding His government, but left us with concrete direction and examples.

Most of God’s people have heard or read what Mr. Armstrong had to say about government being restored to God’s church. He strongly made the point that God’s government was a “top down structure.” This is not difficult to substantiate in God’s word. I Cor. 11:1-3, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

Notice that the NKJ version is being quoted, which rightly tells us to “**imitate**” Paul only as he **imitates** Christ. The KJ version uses the word “follow,” and carries a very different connotation. When “following” an individual you accept them as a guide or leader without question. You carry out their instructions. Example; “Christ is leading ME, therefore you follow ME” or “If I tell you to do something, you do it.”

Under these conditions there is no way to accurately determine or measure that leadership; but when Paul says to imitate him as he imitates Christ, you can easily determine by comparison with the hundreds of actions recorded of Jesus’ life, covering every aspect of human endeavor, how it is to be measured. We have His written word as our guide. **It is when we follow a man that we can be led astray.** When we imitate we have a clear picture of how to conduct our lives, and how those leading the way should be conducting their lives. We have an unchanging guide, Christ’s example through God’s word.

As we continue to read verses two and three, we find that God the Father is the head of everything, and Christ is second in command. It cannot be more plainly stated that Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of woman. "Man is the head of woman," can only be understood as being in marriage. The judgment made by the Eternal in Num 27:6-9, passing the inheritance to the daughters if no son is born to their father, demonstrates that a woman is an independent entity in God's eyes.

This structure of authority is but a very bare outline: but is not to be broken by any man or woman. John, in chapter 15, further clarifies this structure in verses 1-8, "*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*"

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciple."

Just as we found in I Cor. 11:1-3 the Father is in charge. He removes the unprofitable servant. He keeps the health of the whole vine by trimming it to bear more fruit, by putting us to the test. After Joe Tkach, Sr. was put in charge of the WCG he was put to the test to hold fast to the truth. When he began to change the doctrines, each minister of the Body was then put to the test to see if he would hold fast. Would his position in the corporate church, the WCG, be more important than the truth? Would the prestige of the office, the power of his position, and monetary remuneration he received overpower his love of God's truth? Unfortunately few of those leading the way had the intestinal fortitude to stand for the truth, and thus their failure resulted in the test being passed to the individual brethren.

HOW ARE WE SPIRITUALLY FED?

The vine feeds the branches. When we stop taking nourishment from the vine we die spiritually, and the second death is our future. How is it that Christ feeds the branches?

The answer to that question is clearly spelled out in Eph. 4:11-6, “*And He Himself (Christ) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*” For what purpose did He do this? The verses that follow reveal the answer. Verse 12, “*...for the equipping of the saints , (that is, to provide the called out ones with the road map, or knowledge and understanding, for them to attain everlasting life.).....for the work of the ministry.*”

This entails all that is required for the orderly running of the Body of Christ. This would include when, where, and how church services are held; what projects will be carried out and what monies will be spent; who will receive financial aid, and the organization of that aid. It will include the reaching out to this world with the idea of opening a path to salvation for those who are being called by the Father, and the production of the written word and its content, the utilization of the internet, or any other modern technology of communication; an accurate recording of income and expenses, and making this information available to any member of the Body who supports this effort.

A TRANSPARENT CHURCH

It should be noted that any group claiming to be **THE ONE** True Church but is unwilling to show where and how the income is spent, must be hiding something that would cast a shadow on their imitating of Christ. Openness is a base of trust. **The Body must be able to trust those leading the way.** The church, in all of its dealings must be transparent.

Continuing with verse 12.... “*for the edifying of the Body of Christ.*” The key word here is edifying, which is #3619 in Strong’s. This word can mean the act of building, or building as a process; also that which is built, the building. This word is used in Matt. 24:1 as “*buildings of the temple.*” Its spiritual use can be seen in Rom. 14:19, “*Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*” It is also used in II Cor. 10:8, “*For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed.*”

In Eph. 2:21-22 Paul uses this same word when he describes the spiritual temple being built from all in the Body of Christ, “*...in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the spirit.*”

Eph. 4:13 gives a specific purpose for the above organizational structure, who is our example of the Father, taking us back to our central truth. Verse 13, “*Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” (Christ being the image of the Father)

Here Paul is hammering home that single most important purpose of the Father - creating His character in us. In verse 1 of this chapter, Paul beseeches us to walk worthy of the calling; that is, by free choice, to make the right choices in our lives.

Verse 14, “...*that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive.*”

He is saying that if the men of God are to follow this admonition, it will result in the individual being so fundamental in his understanding, that no amount of lying or deceit from within or without can keep him from his ultimate goal.

There is no place in the Bible that more succinctly outlines how the Body of Christ is to function, and the clear goal it is to achieve, than these passages in Eph. 4.

It now becomes quite clear that the sole purpose of government within the church is to facilitate the Father’s ultimate goal of creating righteous character in us. His begotten children are to be encouraged and taught how to make the right choices.

WHO LEADS THE BODY?

It is now time to look at the details of how Christ directs His Body of believers. He does it through men. Why? This has to do with our choosing in an atmosphere devoid of force, human or supernatural. Our understanding must come through the realization that **God’s way is the only way that man can live in peace and happiness.** This is the signpost that should be leading each one through life.

How are those who are responsible for leading and teaching in the church supposed to conduct their personal lives? Jesus teaches this profound truth in Matt. 20:25-28. “*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. (That is, through physical force, to carry out their directives.)*”

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave --- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

Servants or slaves do not force or coerce, but serve. This is an absolute truth for anyone in a position of governing in the church. What Christ is talking about is an inner attitude on the part of those leading the way. Although they are responsible, that responsibility gives them no inherent right of privilege. They are not to order, demand, or make known as an obligation of the brethren to receive preferential treatment, either judicially or monetarily. Although they may be the ones in public positions, i.e. television

or radio broadcasters or writers of publications, although they may be responsible for the expenditures of the money, and although they have the final say in the organization of the Body, they are still under the control of God's law!

At this point, the question of whether or not Christ established a type of “top down” government in the New Testament church must be addressed. It has already been shown that a line of authority was established (Eph. 4) but there are also the direct words of Christ in Matt. 24:45 and in Luke 12:42 showing that He would leave some individual in charge of the Body. Matt. 24:45, “*Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?*” There are several important words to look at in this passage in order to grasp the meaning it is conveying. First is the word “servant,” in Strong’s #1401, “a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other.” Therefore, the one put in charge is not free to wield the power of position as he sees fit, but must be carrying out his master’s direction. That master is Christ.

The next words of importance are “made ruler,” Strong’s #2525, “meaning to set, set down, or place.” It should be clear from his position as a slave that he is only set over the master’s household to do as the master directs. This word is also used in verse 47, where the obedient servant is set over all of the master’s goods. Here the connotation is one of control rather than service.

The word “household” must also be understood to glean the correct meaning of verse 45. It is #2322, *therapeia*, from *therapeuo*, (2323) to heal, serve. Voluntary service, attendance, ministry, and in the care of the sick by implication relief, healing. (Luke 9:11, Rev. 22:2); metaphorically and collectively meaning attendance, domestics, retinue. In this verse, and in Luke 12:42 it refers to the rest, or the other servants belonging to the master.

The one who is “set over” must give the rest of the servants food in due season. This parallels Eph. 4, in that food is for growth and maintenance of the individual believer. In addition, we see the implication that healing would also be involved; thus the total care of those in the household.

The New American Standard Bible reads, “*Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?*”

Now let’s look at the Greek words translated “rule,” “obey,” and “submit” as used when speaking of government in the church. In Strong’s the word, “rule,” #2583, is used five times in the New Testament. Four times it is translated as “rule”, and once as “line”. Here we see rather diverse translations for the same Greek word. The meaning of this word is “anything straight used in examining other things, such as a plumb line in building.”

In II Cor. 10:13 and 15-16 we find the NKJ translates the word “sphere” that is, measuring out the geographic area that Paul was working in. The KJ uses the word “rule” here, which gives the impression that he ruled over them as a monarch.

It is used in Gal. 6:16 and Phil. 3:16 as a measure of our behavior. This should bring to mind what was quoted from Eph. 4, “*To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” Christ is the one who has set the standard for us to follow.

Strong’s #4291 reads, “To cause to stand before, to set over.” Paul uses this word twice in his first letter to Timothy. I Tim. 3:4, “*One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence.*” The key to understanding this leadership comes to life when the word “reverence” is looked at. This is one who not only has the ability to perform well his duties as a citizen but also to adhere to the highest principles and ideals of man and God, thus drawing respect and approval. If a man has done this in his family, he will have a good chance of doing the same thing in the Body of Christ.

There are three basic parts needed to accomplish this: discipline that holds the line, teaching that tells the why and how, and leadership which demonstrates by accomplishments as carried out in life. Paul continues to make the point that if a man is unable to lead his own household down the right path, he certainly cannot lead the Body of Christ. This supports the Father’s main goal for mankind.

The next word to consider is found three times in the 13th chapter of Hebrews as #2233, meaning “to lead or go before, go first, lead the way.” This is its primary meaning. Metaphorically, “to lead out before the mind, i.e. to view, regard, esteem, count, reckon, these are the actions of the things spoken of.” Its first use is in verse 7, “*Remember those who rule over you.*”

Again, this terminology lends credence to a monarchical type of government, one subject to the whims of the monarch. The Diaglott gives a better rendering as, “*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; and viewing attentively the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.*” There must be a desire on the part of the individual to be rightly led, Christ being the ultimate guide.

The second use of this word is found in verse 17, “*Obey those who rule over you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls.*” The first word, “obey,” #3982, has a very interesting meaning in the original Greek, a meaning that cannot be translated with a single English word. The Word Study Dictionary NT, II Mid 1 possessive; meaning to let oneself be persuaded, to be persuaded, (B) to assent to, obey, follow. Thus the true understanding should be gained.

We are then persuaded, not only by words but also by the conduct of those leading the way, that we give our assent to obey. There is a responsibility of the individual to be persuaded of the truth (God’s word). Once this happens, he should be giving his whole-

hearted support to those leading the way. Responsibility is thereby given to the individual to recognize the true man of God, not only by hearing his words, but also by observing his actions. He then is to conduct himself in a Godly manner.

Completing verse 17 of Hebrews 13, “.....as those who must give account. *Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*” Those leading the way will be held responsible for the way in which they deal with the problems of the brethren. When dealing with one who is antagonistic, it is much easier to err by responding in kind, or because one holds back, waiting for a more amenable attitude. The job becomes a joy when you are working with brethren who are whole-hearted in their desire to walk God’s way.

It has already been pointed out that **God’s spiritual law controls His government.** (The law, statutes and judgments amplified.) This is an eternally important understanding that should be kept upper-most in the minds of those responsible for the care and feeding of the flock. This is how they are to measure their own conduct, first and foremost; then they may be able to assist the brethren.

Because the ministry is fundamentally responsible for the implementation of God’s government within the church, they can never go beyond what the law prescribes, or fall short of its requirements. They are under the control of the law.

In Deut. 17:17-20 God gives the kings of Israel an absolute direction in their governance. “*Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.*”

Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.

And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes,

That his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”

Not only were they to follow the laws, but also the statutes and judgments, which are the expansion of the laws to cover the questions arising from the day-to-day interaction of the people. They were the “how to” and “wherefore,” the “nuts and bolts” of his governing of the people.

Today these same laws and statutes are there to control and guide the government within the church. In Matt. 5:17 we read, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or*”
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the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly I say to you, till

heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” The phrase, “*but to fulfill,*” has been used by the religious authorities to claim that Christ has fulfilled the law for us. Therefore, it is not applicable to us. The fact that heaven and earth have not yet passed away seems to be lost to them. Has heaven and earth passed away? By this statement of Christ’s, the law still stands for us today.

He continues throughout the rest of the chapter to clarify how certain of the commandments were to be understood. Yet the religious authorities of today insist that Christ did away with the law. When a lie is repeated often enough, it is believed without putting it to the test. Why would Christ elucidate the commandments if they were no longer in effect?

In Matt. 19 the young rich ruler asked Jesus how to have eternal life. His answer was to “*keep the commandments.*” It is quite clear that God’s laws, along with the statutes and judgments, which clarify the meaning and applications of those laws, were meant for man to adhere to throughout all of the ages of man’s existence.

Therefore, if each individual is required to follow these precepts, how much more is it incumbent on those leading the church to adhere to them in every aspect of its affairs? It is obvious when reading about the laws of the Old Testament that when broken they require the punishment of the offender. The New Testament has no provision for such physical punishment, other than that which naturally occurs as a result of the laws broken; such as the pain inflicted by divorce on the whole family.

Then is sin allowed to run rampant in the church? Is there no provision to address grievances or settle disputes? Is there no way to rein in those power-minded individuals whose God is their belly? Christ was well aware that His church would face these situations and He provided for them with detailed instructions on how to handle such cases. These directions are given in Matt. 18:15-18. Jesus took the principles contained in the books of the Old Testament and made them applicable to His church. In reality these are the same instructions that Christ gave to Moses and the Israelites. This can be shown by matching the corresponding scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is looking at truth, and truth never changes. If Israel of old had followed these instructions and held to them it would be a functioning nation today. Not only would Israel have maintained its existence, but it would also be a shining example to the world, which is what God intended it to be.

Read this astonishing statement that Christ made, speaking through Moses in Deut. 4:1-9, and 14. “*Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you.*”

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor.

But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.

Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?

And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.” Verse 14, “And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.” It should be clear that these same instructions should be taught and followed today in God’s church, with the same result – peace, unity and harmony in the Body.

THREE-STEP PLAN OF GOD’S GOVERNMENT

Verse 15 of Matt. 18, “*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you, and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*” There is a corresponding direction given in Lev. 19:17-18, (Moffatt Bible) It should be noted that if you do not have the intestinal fortitude to face your brother, remain silent to all others about the issue.

“You shall not cherish hate against your fellow countryman; what you must do is to warn him of his fault, lest you incur guilt yourself. You shall not avenge yourself, you shall not bear a grudge against your fellow citizens, but love your neighbor as you love yourself; I am the Eternal.”

The parallel of these two scriptures is obvious. If one is having a problem with a brother, go to him privately and attempt to settle it. It should be obvious that this is for the good of both parties, and the Body as a whole. For if any part of the Body suffers, the whole Body suffers. It is difficult to go forward in an atmosphere of discord. The Body cannot go forward when it has a festering sore draining it of life and vigor.

Ps. 141:5 shows the attitude needed when approached with a grievance. *“Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him reprove me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.”* It is not easy to accept that OUR actions may not reflect those of the Father. It should be remembered that either party could be wrong. It behooves them to settle the matter privately when possible. Prov. 25:8-10, *“Do not go hastily to court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbor himself, and do not disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation be ruined.”*

The second step is verse 16 of Matt. 18, *“But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”* Christ goes back to the instructions that He gave His people in Deut. 19:15, *“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”* This is an important step and must be followed, and it must be done in private with no public disclosure. The witnesses chosen should be discreet, knowing the laws of God. When asking one to be a witness it is important that they are not persuaded to one side or the other before the matter is discussed, but that they come as impartial witnesses. It would be easy to choose one’s own friends to accompany them, but this could cause the other person to perceive that vengeance is in the mind, rather than to have the matter settled equitably, so that the meeting can end on a friendly note. Form does not trump substance.

As they go through the steps toward reconciliation, it should be obvious that courage is required. It is much easier to talk about someone behind his back than to confront him face to face even if in private. Christ does not give any other option – either His instructions are followed or we cannot call ourselves His disciples. To harbor animosity toward another is sin.

The third step is found in verse 17, *“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”* This may seem harsh and unforgiving, but sin cannot be tolerated by God or the Body of Christ. It must be done so that the individual will be jolted into seeing his sin, and then correcting the problem. It should be clear that this whole process is being carried out to facilitate the Father’s prime directive to develop His character by choosing the right way. The choice remains with the individual. The reality of the persuasion lies in the word of God. If the individual has committed himself to that way of life, it will convict him and he will change. This third step brings to bear the total wisdom of the group to persuade each individual to act in a godly manner. It is not a popularity contest in which a vote is taken; it is a matter of opening God’s word in both testaments to see which law, which corresponding statute, and which of the judgments applies, then going forward in unity with that decision.

In way of explanation of how to apply God’s law, let us examine the use of it by Christ in John 8:4-5. *“They said to Him, teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in*

the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?" Without a thorough understanding of the law, the stoning should have been the correct judgment. Christ withheld that judgment. Why?

If Christ would have condemned the woman to stoning, He would have broken the law in two ways. First, Christ recognized that He was not dealing with a straight-forward case of adultery, but rather one of entrapment. Adultery results in two being guilty. Only one participant was brought forward when the accusers plainly stated that she was taken in the very act. Clearly there should have been two brought forward for stoning. Thus, this was entrapment. Entrapment is definitely spelled out in the law. Lev. 19:14, *"You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord."*

One might say this only applies to blind or deaf people. No. This principle applies to all people. Rom. 14:13, *"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not putting a stumbling block, or a cause to fall in our brother's way."*

Secondly, if Christ had allowed the woman to be stoned, He would have broken the law. Num. 35:30, *"Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses, but one witness is not sufficient testimony against the person for the death penalty."* In Deut. 17:6 it says, *"Whoever is worthy of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses, but he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness."*

Both of these scriptures require more than one witness for the death penalty. In John 8:10 Christ asks, *"Where are thy accusers (witnesses)?"* None were there. Without the witnesses, no punishment can be meted out. The stoning punishment reflects a physical kind of thinking by not using the whole law. Christ used the whole law, which encompasses justice and mercy.

We read in John 8:7, *"So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'"* Christ takes this directly from the law. Deut. 17:7, *"The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hands of the people. So you shall put away the evil person from among you."* The witnesses were causal in this sin (entrapment). They were out for vengeance, and their guilt was made plain by Christ. They were no longer credible witnesses. They left! The result? No witnesses, period! No witnesses, no stoning. This is how the government of God works - **through His law.**

It cannot be expressed too strongly that this is not a popularity contest! No matter how good a person he may have been in the past, no matter how much good service he has given to the brethren, no matter that he may be an elder, no matter that he is leading the Body, a judgment not tainted by the above must be rendered solely on the facts established. Christ essentially gave these same directions in Lev. 19:1-2 and 15, *"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and*

say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’” Verse 15, “You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. But in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” Num. 35:24, “Then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.” Note that they are to follow the guidelines laid down in the judgments, and that the matter was brought before the congregation.

Deut. 19:15, *“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”* A minimum of two witnesses is required in any matter. I Tim. 5:19, *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”* Paul holds to the same requirement as given in Deuteronomy.

There must be an absolute commitment to this process by all the brethren. Christ, our head, has given these instructions to His Body of Believers. Can we disregard this directive and still be called His disciples? The answer is a resounding, NO!

In I Cor. 5 Paul had to correct the congregation at Corinth because of sin. A man had taken his father’s wife, and the brethren were willing to accept this sin rather than have the intestinal fortitude to put him out. Then in Chapter 6 he corrects them for not following what Christ had instituted to resolve problems among themselves, the very thing that we have under discussion here. I Cor. 6:1-5, *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?”*

In verse 5 Paul is asking if there is not one wise man? In reality there should be many wise men, as we can read in Prov. 9:9-10, *“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* These men should understand God’s law and know how to apply it. In I Cor. 5:1 Paul points out that this sexual sin is so grievous that even the Gentiles recognize its evil. Yet they were unable to come to grips with it. Sin is the transgression of God’s law (I John 3:4).

PAUL FOLLOWS MATTHEW 18

Paul goes on to list a litany of sins in I Cor. 6:9-10, all of which were proclaimed sin by Christ in the books of the law. These early chapters of I Corinthians are a strong directive for the implementation of Matt. 18. Then in the book of Galatians he shows that he followed Christ’s instructions in his own dealings with Peter and some of the other apostles. Gal. 1:18-19, *“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and*

remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

What was under discussion at this time between these two men? Two places in Acts need to be looked at. First, in Acts 9:26-30 we read that the brethren feared to have anything to do with Paul until Barnabas took him to the apostles (mainly Peter) and testified to his conversion. His attempt to convert the Hellenists had resulted in their attempt on Paul's life, so the brethren sent him to Caesarea and then to Tarsus.

Acts 22:17-21 further elucidates what happened on this first visit to Jerusalem. *"Then it happened, when I was returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance, and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then he said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"*

There can be no doubt that Paul would have told Peter of the vision, and that, coupled with the attempt on Paul's life, resulted in his being sent out of the country to the Gentiles. God used visions to direct the work of the early church, especially that concerning the Gentiles. Remember Peter's vision of the sheet full of unclean animals that God used to show him the acceptance of Gentiles into the church. If something this spectacular would have happened to us, we would certainly discuss this. As a result Peter sent Paul on his way with a full understanding of the mission that Paul was to carry out. The converting of the Gentiles resulted in bringing them into the Body as equal members with the Jews. Remember the result of Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10:28. *"But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."*

Picking up the story in Gal. 1:20, Paul makes a rather curious statement as an apostle. He affirms that what he is writing is the truth. He uses his office and the written word to confirm his presentation of the facts that led up to his confrontation with Peter in Gal. 2:14. This statement is made because he is giving a formal, legal presentation. Paul finishes the chapter by explaining that though the brethren of Judea would not be able to recognize his face, they did recognize the success of his work among the Gentiles, and that he now was with them preaching the gospel.

This is Paul's formal explanation, showing that he was following exactly what Christ prescribed in Matt. 18 as the initial step in his private presentation about the Gentiles to Peter.

Gal. 2:1-2 shows he took two witnesses with him to confirm that they understood what he was teaching to the Gentiles, and they were in total agreement. Verses 9 and 10 show that James, Peter, and John were in agreement with what Paul and Barnabas were doing. This is the second step of Matt. 18 – the witness phase – being followed by Paul.

The crux of the problem is seen in Gal. 2:11-13, “*But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.*” Here we see Peter, Barnabas, and the converted Jews actually breaking God’s law. This was not just some minor slight, but went against the law of God. Lev. 19:34, “*But the stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*” These men were sinning, but they did not recognize it. Paul brought them before the congregation to point out their problem.

In the prior meetings they had given lip service, but failed to carry out God’s way in real life situations. By refusing to act, they showed that they had not accepted the Gentiles as their brothers. This confrontation brought them to repent of what they were doing. Obviously they did repent of what they were doing, as no further action needed to be taken.

The inescapable conclusion is that the instructions of Matt. 18 are an integral part of the government within the church of God. They must be followed if we are to be true disciples of Jesus, and of His way.

Whether there is a disagreement between two members, or between a member and a highly positioned elder, this procedure must be followed. As I Tim. 5:19 shows, Paul allowed an elder to be brought before the congregation when two witnesses confirmed the allegations. It cannot be stressed strongly enough: first personal contact, second contact with witnesses, and third the matter is brought before the congregation. The assembly’s decision is to be made solely based on the law, statutes and judgments of God’s word - not on personal preferences or personalities. This is a decision based solely on the law, statutes and judgments, **not a vote**.

Does Matt. 18:18 allow decisions to be made contrary to the laws of God? “*Assuredly, I say unto you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*” As the NKJ translates this verse, there is no law, statute, or judgment that could not be abrogated or changed by man’s decision. Then those changes made would be confirmed by God in heaven. How could this be possible when Christ said that He came to make no changes in His Father’s law? If Christ could make no changes, how could anyone else make changes?

The following explanation from “The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge” will answer this question. The explanation is technical, but it shows why it is wrong, and how it should be translated. “Greek, *dasate*, 2nd person plural, 1 – aorist active subjunctive. Shall be (Greek) *estai*, 3rd person singular, future middle indicative. Bound (Greek) *dedmena*, perfect passive participle, nominative plural neuter.” The same unusual form is found in Matt. 16:19. Burton (NT Moods & Tenses, section 94, pg. 45) also gives

Luke 12:52 and Heb. 2:13 as instances of what he terms the “periphrastic Future Perfect.” It may be more literally rendered “shall (or must) already have been bound” ye shall loose (Greek) *lusate*, 2nd person plural, 1 aorist active subjunctive. Shall be (Greek) *estai*, person singular, future middle indicative. Loosed (Greek) *lelumenna*, perfect passive participle, nominative plural neuter. More literally this may be rendered “shall (or must) already have been loosed.” In the Greek text important distinctions in tenses are made here, so that the participles may be more literally rendered as indicated. The sense is that the apostles were to loose and bind what already had been permanently loosed (permitted) and bound (forbidden) in heaven; thus the apostles carried out their teaching in accordance with what was already taught by Christ, as the mandate of heaven; heaven did not merely ratify the earthly decisions of the apostles.”

Instead of giving the apostles of the Body of Christ in general the right to change the laws, it in fact prohibited them from making any changes. The translators of our present Bibles, in both Matt. 18:18 and Matt.16:19 realized two important opposing principles were at stake: (1) - the power of the church fathers to make decisions that would control doctrine as they saw fit, and (2), the more important, that they would be controlled by the law, statutes and judgments of God. Thus there would be a standard by which they could be measured and controlled. This would have turned their system of beliefs upside down, and they would then be forced to come under the authority of the Bible as a whole, not leaving them to pick and choose, or change the system of beliefs to suit their own desires.

The correct translation carries true to form with the earlier words of Christ in Matt. 5:17, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*” We cannot forget – **GOD’S LAW CONTROLS GOD’S GOVERNMENT!** It is this same law that must be inculcated into our minds, thus controlling our actions, and reflects God’s ultimate goal of creating righteous character in us. The choice is ours! WE choose! Right or wrong!

Amongst the many splinter groups who left the WCG, there are some who make the claim that they are the ONE True Church of God. Those not making the claim outright often do it by implication. It has been shown that the directive Christ gave His church in Matt. 18 is not only an integral part of administering His government, but an important way of developing righteous character and judgment by using God’s law, among and by the brethren. If any one group is truly the ONE True Church then you would expect to find them implementing this direction. All of them claim Christ as their head, and it should be easy to see them following Christ’s instructions in every matter, this one in particular.

The obvious end result would be that no minister or elder has the independent right to disfellowship any member of the Body without the public participation of the Body of Believers. Therefore, any group in which the minister disfellowships a person without following the procedures of Matt. 18 is clearly not following the head, Christ.

This has long been a failure in the area of church government. The experiences of this past year caused me to look more deeply into this requirement the Savior has given. There is great wisdom embedded in these instructions, and the peace that they would bring if followed is the spiritual way that He intended.

The Body must act as one, in a unified way. I Cor. 12:26-27, *“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ and members individually.”* This can only happen when we allow God’s Spirit to guide us into truth. His Spirit is working in us to one end: the creation of righteous character; that is, thinking like God, forgiving like God, giving like God. On the other hand, He is not looking for a “beehive” mentality, where we act as unthinking beings, not contemplating our own actions or those of the world around us.

God placed each of us on this earth to learn what happens when life is experienced outside of the laws that He gave us to live by. It means going through suffering ourselves, and being witness to the suffering of those of this world; how humans are fighting their way to extinction.

God’s way, “that way,” epitomized by His laws, statutes and judgments, and exemplified by the life of Jesus in showing us how they should be lived; and our whole- hearted belief which results in living in compliance with them, is God’s ultimate goal. This is His creation of righteous character.

Earlier the statement was made that **“God’s law controls God’s Government”** and it is Matt. 18 **and its application that results in that control.** As it has been shown through Peter’s humiliation at Antioch, all brethren from the highest position to lowest are subject to this procedure set by Christ. Remember, **it is the law of God that controls these decisions and the actions of those leading the way.** The Body acting as one unified whole may bring to a guilty conscience the willingness to correct his way. If not, that one is set out of the Body by consensus, based on the broken law.

This is not done in secret or without witnesses, but in an open hearing. Humans in general hate to be caught in a mistake or a lie, or in any circumstances that would reflect poorly on themselves. The higher the position, whether in the church or without, the more one will do to cover the error. When reaching the highest echelon, one thinks himself infallible, or feels he must appear so to others. Many times he will do whatever he can to cover for himself and to hide his mistake and weakness. If this requires the destruction of another individual, that is acceptable in his eyes because, after all, he must protect his infallibility and reputation. In his wrong thinking he is willing to sacrifice another, justifying his actions by saying that it is for the “good of the people.” This is not God’s way. God’s way is that we recognize our weaknesses and mistakes and correct them regardless of the embarrassment it may cause.

This is precisely why Christ instituted Matt. 18. When one leading the way follows

this direction with the brethren, he understands that he also is subject to the same law and procedure. Thus it shows his true conversion, because he voluntarily places himself under the government of God, regulated by the law of God. With heartfelt conviction he understands that God's way, outlined by His law, is the only way for a true Christian to conduct his life. He voluntarily places himself under those laws, statutes, and judgments along with his brethren.

This procedure is not meant to resolve doctrinal issues. Doctrinal clarifications are to be accomplished through conferences following the example in Acts 13 and Acts 15. The Acts 13 conference reflects the desire for direction from God in carrying the gospel to other nations, i.e. the work of the church. Acts 15 was to show us how a doctrinal issue is to be resolved.

It should be clear that conferences are held with the specific purpose that Christ, the head of the Body, will guide the minds of those attending to resolve issues so God's work can move forward. When putting on the mind of Christ we set aside our own desires and thoughts.

There have been seven conferences since the inception of this little flock called The Church of God. These conferences were not to establish any new doctrine, but to confirm our beliefs, and in some cases add to their validity new knowledge that would repudiate the gainsayers of recent times.

When these past conferences were held we were not truly aware of the fact that they were the government of God in action. The idea was to follow the example in Acts 13, and every conference was started with a day of fasting – opening with prayer to implore the Father and His Son to open the minds of those present to better understanding of His word; to give understanding and direction so that what was to be taught to the brethren would be the will of God.

An agenda for the topics and plans to be discussed was prepared well in advance of the conference, and was sent to all who were invited to attend. Along with the ministers and deacons, others who were knowledgeable or had particular expertise or skills in certain areas were invited. A general invitation was given to any other brethren who wished to come.

Spiritual or doctrinal items were always discussed on the fast (first) day of the conference. One man would make the initial presentation and then the topic was opened for discussion among those present. No one was prevented from speaking. The following is a partial list of topics brought at past conferences.

Was Mr. Armstrong the Elijah?

God's calendar, Which day is Pentecost? & Is Passover on the 14th or the 15th?

What is the Government of God?

Divorce and Remarriage

Porneia – Its Meaning and Application to D & R

The Gifts of the Spirit

When all input was given to the subject under discussion, the man considered to be the “elder Elder” would conclude with a confirming summation. For example, in the case of “Was Mr. Armstrong the Elijah?” it is clear that God has shown us through this man’s life’s work that he fulfilled the office of Elijah, restoring all things to us that would lead us to eternal life.

The conference is clearly part of God’s government in action. Christ nourishes the branches through His word, given to those who are responsible for leading the Body. These are doctrines proven and clarified for the very purpose Paul stated in Eph. 4:12-16, *“...for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

God’s government in the Body was given for an overall purpose – to support the Father’s prime directive – the creation of righteous character through free choice. **Therefore, that government is subject to the laws, statutes and judgments as given to us by the Word of God.** It cannot be added to, or taken from what God has spoken.

In Matt. 7:15 a very poignant warning is given. *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”* Jesus is saying that you cannot measure a man’s righteousness by his outward appearance. False prophets will look good outwardly – that is how they deceive. They understand that they must look and sound good. Remember, Paul told the brethren to judge not only by what is said, but also by how they conduct their personal lives, and how they deal with the brethren. Good trees, good fruit; bad trees, bad fruit. *“Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

Verses 21 and 22 of Matthew 7 may be a surprise because Christ tells us how NOT to measure their work. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’”*

Brethren tend to use the very criteria He told them not to use. They say, “This man has a work. Look at the magazines and booklets being produced” And, “Look at his T-V and radio programs, and what a good speaker he is.” This is what they like to use to measure, just as we are told not to do. Continuing in verse 23 we see this truth driven home. “*And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*” They neither teach nor practice God’s law as He directs in Matt. 18, or they are practicing lawlessness by using their own measure of right and wrong, disregarding the Word’s direct command on how the Body is to become like the Father.

When we allow the desire to reach out to this world to become our primary motivation, it clouds our judgment and we lose sight of the inherent purpose of the organized Body: that of enhancing the development of the individual through the teaching and application of God’s spiritual law.

The Government of God and how it is to be applied within the church must be controlled by God’s law as directed by our head, Jesus Christ.

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