

I Love Government!

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It seems people despise, resent and complain about government most of the time. Perhaps it is because most governments try to fool most of the people most of the time. But we also need to address another key reason.

Consider a child whose brain tells him he should walk like an adult. His brain orders his hands to turn loose of the chair and commands his feet and legs to march to Daddy. The hands reluctantly respond, but the feet and legs respond even more so and land him on his diaper or head. This frustrates and frightens the brain, which immediately sends an urgent message to the body parts with which it has already developed a strong working relationship. Lots of noise and tears result. This process repeats until the extremities all mature sufficiently to carry out their orders. Parents fret until the brain-body coordination of the child is mature enough to lay their concerns about injuries to rest.

For a few years the child is fairly coordinated. Once rapid growth begins at age eleven or twelve, another period ensues when the brain and feet are on different wavelengths. Opposing seventh-grade football teams need not always tackle each other, as they often self-destruct over their own feet!

Ah, now the teen years begin! Choir directors fret over boys who sing tenor and bass on the same note. The voice box does not clearly discern who is in charge, boy or man! Hormonal development and suffusion create confusion between the brain and its servants, the sex organs, eyes, ears, nose and hands.

Even in adulthood, the mind has certain ideals and goals it desires to attain. The rest of the body parts tug in different directions, confusing the mind. Just like the baby landing on his diaper, we find ourselves on our rear ends--suffering from addictions, divorces and career failures.

By the time we should have it together, if ever, the ravages of aging intrude. Eyes, ears, arms and legs wear out and refuse to obey instructions from the brain efficiently. The brain itself can begin to short-circuit, causing memory lapses and feeble direction to other worn body parts. Again, we land on our behinds--this time with broken hips. Ultimately, feeble signals from the brain and feeble responses from the body render our parts totally without government. We die.

Why We Should Love Government

I love government. I love it when my mind and body respond to lofty, worthy ideals and coordinate splendidly in attaining them!

I am so thankful God put my brain in charge of the rest of my body. It is bad enough when my mind wanders, but what if my feet wandered independently? I would walk in circles or do the splits!

What about my tongue? Some have accused me at times of allowing it to waggle independent of my brain. Trouble every time! With perfect government of that organ, I would be perfect (James 3:2).

One morning I wandered into the kitchen under the illusion I was wide awake and in control, only to discover my recalcitrant hand placing an empty coffee cup in the microwave! My brain was not yet sending clear signals to my partially independent body parts. Pity the other drivers had I started my morning commute at that point!

With weak, indecisive government, I am "living impaired." Totally without government, I am dead. Therefore, I love government.

So far, so good.

The child, the teen, the adult, the aged--all desperately seek total control of all their functions. Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal still desperately wishes he could govern all his parts sufficiently to make a free throw consistently.

Since strong central government, as discussed thus far, is so good, where does the rub come? Why do people despise and resent government?

The baby wants his brain to tell his feet what to do. The key word is "his." His brain, his feet. Daddy's or Mommy's brain and tongue will not do. He wants his brain to tell his feet where to go and when. He does not want Daddy or Mommy to enter the equation. He certainly does not want their hand, from behind and about a foot off the ground, to enter into it.

This, simply stated, is the problem humans have with government. With parents. With school teachers. With city, county, state, federal or international governments. With church governments. With God Himself. Or even with ourselves when our consciences seek to overrule the desires of the flesh.

By nature, we do not want ANYONE other than our own mind and emotions telling us what to do! As a concept, I love government. You love government. That is, if we can convince ourselves we are responding to self-government!

When our very own consciences trouble us, our brains and other parts tend to rebel. As the chicken commercial went, "Pieces is pieces and parts is parts." No part wants to be told what to do by any other part. A chicken consists of parts, but a pile of parts is not a chicken. A chicken can cackle and lay eggs. A pile of chicken parts can do nothing except rot.

My body, fully assembled and coordinated, can accomplish goals if all the parts obey the brain. Dismembered, my parts cannot respond and produce worthwhile tasks. They become worthless to the body. Perhaps this sounds simplistic--throughout I Corinthians 12, Paul uses the same "simplistic" analogy of the body to explain God and government--yet few would disagree with the concepts offered so far. We do cherish government on some level.

What about the Church?

Though all hands may agree so far raising the church issue will cause emotional responses about where this is headed. In other words, is he about to write something with which I will disagree?

Resistance comes easily. The real key is to internalize the concepts of government to the point they are an integral part of us. That stops the resistance. Once we understand and accept the mind of Christ to the point that "this mind [is] in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5), governing ourselves according to His instructions becomes easier.

The world tends to reject any governmental direction from God. As disciples who have converted to or internalized God and His laws as "our" way--or more accurately made ourselves part of His way--we begin to respond to Him. The point is, we are becoming at one with Him and therefore rebel less as we grow into oneness.

His government is one thing. Church government is a horse of a different color! There is a definite difference between the government of God by God and a church government of men learning to govern as God Himself governs. No two men will do it exactly as Christ would. There are different administrations (I Corinthians 12:5, KJV). God accepts this as long as the leaders do not compromise the principles of His law.

The key to success is the same as with God governing directly. Find the correct form of church government--and those who are correctly applying it-- and internalize it. Make it part of your thinking, and the rebellion against it as an outside force will quickly diminish.

Is an Ordained Ministry Really Necessary?

The greater church of God is wrestling with governmental issues:

- Was apostolic authority given only to the original twelve, making a hierarchical ministry unnecessary today?
- Is someone an "elder" just because he is older?
- Should we all be teachers?

- Does Matthew 18:20 give permission for as few as two or three to gather and call themselves a church?
- Can we successfully look to Christ as our "personal Shepherd" and repudiate any other leadership, thereby forming a church of one?

All these questions plague the greater church of God today. Why is there a problem? How did it develop? What is the solution?

Galatians 4:26 and 6:16 show Jerusalem and Israel should be spiritually defined and addressed apart from physical Israel. Thus, when Ezekiel 34 speaks about "the shepherds of Israel," the prophecy is aimed against the ministry of God's church.

Ezekiel condemns the ministry as a whole for being more concerned for self and paycheck than for the "sheep," the members of the church. Rather than helping, healing and leading, government was often administered with force and cruelty. Talking the talk was followed far more frequently than walking the walk. God also charges them with defiling the doctrine, which verse 18 pictures as trodden pasture and fouled water. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude all warn about "wolves" entering at the end, rending the flock and introducing another gospel.

Is it any wonder respect for the ministry is at low ebb? God Himself is very upset with shepherds who cared more for themselves than for the sheep. Through misuse and abuse, wolves in sheep's clothing ripped and tore the sheep. God and man deplore and reject such a ministry. The ministry today is in sad disarray, distrusted and despised by many. Some ministers are reckoned as hirelings who cared not for the sheep, but only for their paychecks. These men would compromise the truth, even teach what they knew was wrong, to retain their salaries.

Zechariah 11:3 describes a forsaken ministry, howling over the loss of their flocks, which they mistreated. I cringe to write this, having been many years in the ministry. However, it is true, and I have to analyze how much and in what ways I contributed to the problem, then approach God to "confess and forsake" those sins (Proverbs 28:13).

Screaming for "respect for the ministry" will not help. These hurts can only be healed by proper example and time, combined with a forgiving heart, established by God, in those who have been harmed.

Because of these abuses, insidious Laodiceanism and our natural proclivity to resent any government except our own, we have a church despised and blown apart by God Himself (Read all of Lamentations, Ezekiel 22:25-29 and 24:21 to confirm who is behind the separation.)

Hierarchy

Wolves have scattered the sheep into groups of one to ten to hundreds. A few groups of a few thousand have remained. Because people tend to seek justification for whatever position they find themselves in, this scattering has spawned questions and theories about the need for a ministry, an issue seldom considered before Herbert Armstrong's death.

Is a hierarchical church government biblical? Is it still needed in view of the break up of the Worldwide Church of God? Can people survive and be saved on their own? Where is this situation headed? Where is God in all this?

At one time in our parent church, we all looked to one leader. Herbert Armstrong often said God works through only one administration, one man, at a time. Today, the whole argument against this is based on the premise: "We all have the Holy Spirit. God guides us personally. Ordination is meaningless. I can teach though no one has laid hands on me. We do not need ministers."

A look at Israel's history shows the same scenario. Through Moses came great deliverance. Under him, Israel was unified both in purpose and politically. As to leadership, God clearly established that Moses was the man. Korah and his cohorts challenged this, saying to Moses and Aaron:

"... "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" ... Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us?" Numbers 16:3, 13 (NKJV).

There is not a whit of difference in meaning between the statements of today's independents and Korah! While condemning Moses as hierarchical, they forgot they also had positions in that hierarchy. They were part of what they were condemning! Notice how Moses replies to them:

"Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?" Numbers 16:9-10 (NKJV).

Moses lays it right back on them! They had been appointed apart from the rest of the congregation just as he had been. They despised and took lightly that appointment, desiring the higher job! They did not despise hierarchy--they despised not being HIGHER in that hierarchy! They wanted to call the shots their way.

The same is true today. Even in those groups condemning organized government, someone emerges as

spokesman, organizer and/or leader. Those who disagree with this then split off again. The process tends to continue until little or nothing remains. Are these fruits godly?

"All the People Are Holy"

Did the truths we hold dear come from scholarship or the revelation of God? Herbert Armstrong was no Hebrew or Greek scholar. God taught him a little at a time over many years. He kept the holy days for many years before understanding how they depict the plan of salvation for all of mankind. As far as we know, no scholar, individual Christian or any church group ever understood God's plan of salvation just by studying the Bible.

Yet God's plan is crystal clear to us now that it has been revealed through God's servant and explained by him. Though we are holy, God shows throughout the Bible that He appoints and anoints specific leaders. He reveals His Word through them, and they preach and teach it to the people.

"All the people are holy"--and therefore their opinions are just as good as anyone else's-- is a dangerous position to take! Why?

At God's direction, the earth swallowed up Korah and his followers, yet on the very next day, the people accused Moses and Aaron of killing them (verse 41). They said, "You have killed the people of the LORD." God was so angry at their missing the point that He intended to kill all of them! At Moses' intercession, only 14,700 died. Was their position dangerous or what? This sounds similar to Psalm 12:4: "Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?" (NKJV).

Every man leaning to his own understanding is divisive. In the real world, without a leader, a group can

do little or nothing positive. Even our lauded "democratic" society throws democracy to the wind in military training and war. How many battles could be won if everyone made individual decisions on when, where, why, who and how he would fight? A smaller force united under one leader would quickly defeat a hundred armies of two or three.

We understand this on a practical basis, but cannot seem to translate it to God's army. Did the church accomplish a powerful work while it was united under one leader, Herbert W. Armstrong? Did The Plain Truth circulation reach over six million? Did the TV and radio programs blanket the earth? Did a successful college program train helpers for that work? Compare this to what has happened since Worldwide shattered into hundreds of smaller groups and individual pieces.

Central Government

The time of the judges is not a stellar clip in Israel's highlight film. God's evaluation of it closes the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25 NKJV). Verse 24 shows each man did "his own

thing." When God is displeased, as He was then, He often sends famines (Ruth 1:1), and a spiritual famine is what we are experiencing now (Amos 8:11).

Contrast the fruits of when the people appoint a leader (Saul) and when God appoints a leader (David). Saul's reign was tumultuous and his dynasty short lived. Under David, despite his personal problems, Israel enjoyed long-term unity and prosperity. Even with a revolving door of good and evil kings, Israel and Judah fared better with central leadership than without.

In the early years, Herbert Armstrong did not understand the necessity of hierarchical central government. Only as his efforts at building local groups fell apart did he discern a need for a trained ministry. This need so impressed him that he founded a college for the express purpose of training ministers. It flourished under God's obvious blessing, and it became a globe-girdling organization. A few Korahs appeared and disappeared, and the subsequent plagues spiritually killed and maimed thousands of sheep. After Mr. Armstrong's death, wolves ravaged the flock.

Is there any hope for us today? Is spiritual Israel as Ezekiel describes? "Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" (Ezekiel 37:11 NKJV). What are the fruits of this present every-man-for-himself situation? Are we accomplishing a great work? What a pity that an organization, blessed under one man to accomplish a great work, has been torn in pieces that of themselves can do very little if anything. Yet each piece thinks it "holy unto itself."

They have forgotten--or ignore--that God actually commands us to follow men! Paul writes, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV). Hebrews 13:7 says of the ministry, "whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." I Corinthians 4:16, Philippians 3:17 and II Thessalonians 3:7-9 give similar admonitions.

The Body Analogy

We need to compare our situation with the New Testament, the place where today's "spiritual democrats" scamper to justify themselves. Here, they claim, are proofs for spiritually flying solo with Christ as their personal teacher, or considering a church to be "where two or three are gathered together in My name" (Matthew 18:20).

Christ unarguably established a hierarchy with the twelve apostles. Some contend that it did not extend below them or succeed them for future administrations. Did Christ appoint only apostles in the church? No, I Corinthians 12:18, 28-30 and Ephesians 4:11-16 show that God has set many different offices and people in them as HE chooses. These scriptures describe an obvious chain of authority within the church to prepare its members for God's Kingdom.

Paul uses the "body" analogy with Christ as "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). He explains that Christians "are the body of Christ, and members

individually" (I Corinthians 12:27). Can we claim to stand individually, apart from the body? What happens if a body part is dismembered? It rots. It can do nothing unless connected to the body (verse 21). In other words, it is useless. The smallest or weaker parts are also necessary (verse 22), but they also are of no value and useless unless attached. There is to be no division or schism between body parts (verse 25).

The body will ultimately go into the Kingdom. It may be missing some offending parts (Matthew 18:7-10). Jesus uses the analogy to show that all members may not make it, but He will not marry a bride with missing parts. He will heal the body, restoring its parts or replacing them with new ones to make it whole again. Using a different metaphor, Romans 11 explains a grafting process to restore the entire tree if the natural branches are cut off.

Teachers and Elders

Do we qualify as teachers just because we are long-time members of the church and know enough to teach others (Hebrews 5:12)? Even so, should all be teachers? James warns, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1 NKJV).

Does one qualify as an elder simply by being chronologically the oldest in a given group? "Old" is not a qualification of the ministry, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The oldest man in the congregation may not have ANY of these spiritual qualifications; he may indeed be an old fool! Conversely, he may be a nice guy and truly converted but have no ability or inclination to teach. Also, many old people are newly converted-- true babes in Christ! Should someone serve the church if he is not a man who walks by faith as shown by his works? In contrast, Paul exhorts Timothy not to allow his youth to be despised (I Timothy 4:12), though he was ordained to the ministry. He even had other ministers or elders under his supervision. Paul instructed him to pay them double if they ruled well (I Timothy 5:17). This shows both authority and remuneration hierarchical administration!

Several other scriptures bear on this topic:

"So when they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed [ordained, KJV] elders in every church,..." (Acts 14:23 NKJV).

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [elders], to shepherd the church of God..." (Acts 20:28 NKJV).

"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7 NKJV).

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. ..." (Hebrews 13:17 NKJV).

Dozens of other passages further clarify that the New Testament church had authority and hierarchical structure.

Studying the Greek words for elder and bishop is inconclusive, as the writers used generic words. They can be "loaded" either way. However, context and a comparison of clear scriptures, such as the ones cited above, give absolute proof of hierarchical administration in the New Testament age.

Family Government

God's government is a family government. The Father sets the rules. The mother is the church (Galatians 4:26) who fulfills Proverbs 31. She, through the ministry (I Peter 5:1-4), is to clothe, feed and care for her family. She selects the food, prepares it and preaches it. God gives her leeway to administer things under Him. The children, under her direct supervision, are to follow her as she follows the Father's instructions, only refusing if she departs from them (Acts 5:29).

The children are to be self-governing under the Father and mother! The mother can disfellowship--put out of the family--if the children do not heed the oversight of both Father and mother (I Corinthians 5:5; I Timothy 1:20). By their free moral agency, they choose to obey or disobey.

Even a child is known by his works (Proverbs 20:11). Children have a responsibility to mature, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), but they never have total autonomy until mature (Galatians 4:1-2). Full spiritual maturity will be reached when we are born into the Kingdom of God (I John 3:2). Until then, we are under the direct supervision of the mother.

Even afterward, we will eternally be part of a Family with hierarchical rulership from the Father through

Christ, Abraham, David and others. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Why would He have hierarchy in the Old Testament, suspend it after the apostles, only to reinstitute it in the Kingdom? The problem is not whether there is government over us, but whether or not we will submit to it!

"Where Two or Three Are Gathered"

What about "where two or three are gathered together in My name" (Matthew 18:20)? Many stay-at-home members use this verse to justify not fellowshiping with a larger organization. On the surface, it seems to support their argument. However, we must look at it in context.

The chapter begins with Jesus teaching about our need for humility (verses 1-5). He uses the analogy of body parts to show the importance of not offending little ones (verses 6-10). He then gives the Parable of the Lost Sheep to show His concern for every sheep

(verses 11-14). He instructs about how we should deal with offenses among us (verses 15-20). The context of the entire chapter is interpersonal relations and offenses, not church administration. Peter understood this, for he immediately asks how often one should forgive a brother (verse 21).

God requires two or three witnesses lest injustice come from one man's word against another (verse 16; Deuteronomy 19:15). He will honor the decision based on the judgment of two or three along with the accuser. If the offender will not listen to them, the offense should be taken to a larger forum--the church. The very context assumes the existence of a larger group. God prefers, however, that matters be handled privately in a smaller group whom He will be among rather than escalating every personal problem to the attention of the whole church. Notice the instruction: Go to the offender ALONE first, then escalate it only as necessary to solve the problem.

In I Corinthians 5, Paul shows how this works in practical application when a church member was unabashedly committing sexual sins. Notice that Paul had ministerial, hierarchical authority over the Gentile church in Corinth. He even made his judgment of the situation-- disfellowship that man!--without being present! Later, upon the man's repentance, he ordered him restored, and forgave even as they forgave (II Corinthians 2:10). He also legislated what their attitude and approach to a repentant sinner should be!

Did he allow every group of two or three in the congregation to make a judgment? How would God have bound the conflicting judgments that surely would have arisen between the conservatives and liberals in Corinth? The church would have been divided into many small groups had Paul not exercised his authority.

Is that not what we have seen in the greater church of God as groups have misapplied Matthew 18:20, lifting it out of context, and justifying their own doctrinal and administrative decisions? This misapplication and twisting of this one scripture automatically repudiates any authority God placed in an ordained ministry and splinters the church. Is that how Paul understood Scripture, or did he constantly defend his own position as an apostle and that of the local ordained ministry to preserve unity?

We are told to judge by the fruits. What are the fruits of two or three people deciding they can make doctrinal and administrative judgments? We need look no further than the continual dividing of groups in today's greater church of God to see that the fruits are not good.

Scattered sheep are just that: scattered and in grave danger. Contrast the dubious idea of Christ giving administrative authority to two or three scattered sheep to the very clear and powerful administrative authority given to Peter as head administrator of the church in Matthew 16:18 (see also John 21:15-17). Compare also Hebrews 5:4 where no man can take the office of high priest to himself. Can any of us decide we are the final word? Can we take any office in the priesthood to ourselves? God compares presumption to witchcraft (I Samuel 15:23).

Origin of the Ministry

Where did the ministry originate? In Matthew 16:18, Christ gives authority to Peter and the apostles who in turn ordained others. Ephesians 4:11-12 shows Christ gave the offices in the ministry and for express purposes: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." In II Corinthians 10:8, Paul adds, "our authority. ...the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction... ."

Let us carry this one step further: Without a true ministry we cannot enter the Kingdom of God! How so?

"...And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14-15, 17 NKJV). The belief required for salvation comes from hearing God's Word! We, God's begotten offspring, did not hear or understand the TRUE gospel until we heard it from the one sent by God. He was ordained by a remnant of true believers that have existed down through the centuries. We do not have to search history to find the continuous thread. GOD SAYS His church, including leadership as a necessary part, will not die out--it will continue to the end (Matthew 28:20; 16:18).

We have seen GOD gave the ministry as His gift to the church. How else would we have heard the truth? How else would we have been baptized? How else would we receive the Holy Spirit except by the laying on of hands by those who have been authorized to do so?

Simon Magus realized there was only one way to receive the Holy Spirit. He tried to buy it, but Peter repudiated him (Acts 8:9-24). Simon then started his own church, but the Holy Spirit has never been in it. He apparently turned to Satan for power, establishing the False Church with a false spirit, a false gospel and a false ministry.

A Shepherd like David

God's flock is currently scattered and, it would seem, in grave danger. Some today say that they only need Christ as their Shepherd, and they can continue as a flock of one. God knows they cannot spiritually survive such a solitary, self-imposed exile.

Are we so vain and self-righteous as to think we can exist alone in a spiritual wilderness of wolves, bears, lions, disease and drought? If so, we do not understand much of the nature and abilities of sheep! Pigs and goats can become wild or feral and thrive, but domestic sheep do not adapt to unattended life. They do not survive!

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-13), the 99 were safely in the fold. They were not in danger! The one that "goes astray"--that is, wanders from the flock--was in trouble.

God says in Ezekiel 34:23, "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them." Using Galatians 6:16 as a principle--that the church is spiritual Israel--the

prophecies show Christ will appoint one shepherd to gather His flock scattered by a rebellious ministry. If the first half of Ezekiel 34 applies to today's ministry in the church, then the latter half, appointing a type of David, also applies now (see Isaiah 55:1-4; Zechariah 12:3, 7-10; 13:1).

God understands His scattered, broken, diseased sheep are in grave danger unless rescued. That is why He will appoint a shepherd in the spirit of David--to lead gently, surely, faithfully, righteously, in skillfulness and integrity (Psalm 78:70-72; Ezekiel 34:23-31). He is commissioned to tend and keep God's flock lest the sheep be totally destroyed.

As sheep, then, do we have an obligation to find a true ministry? Rather than going out into a dangerous wilderness alone or in twos and threes, we should seek a proper shepherd. Obviously, we would look for a ministry that has continued in the "faith once delivered" and is repentant and humble.

The life of David illustrates this point (I Samuel 22:1-2). He did not seek to build an army or gather a "flock." When they heard of him and what kind of man he was, the people sought and found him! His brothers, his father's household and those in distress, in debt and discontented came to him.

Jesus emphatically states, "There will be ONE flock and ONE shepherd" (John 10:16). However, we have hope for unity even before Christ's return. Rather than fight church government, we should be praying that God will soon send one in the spirit and attitude of David, that we might again be one flock, safely at rest in the mountains of Israel.