

Friday, December 6, 2013

Dear David,

We are in deeply challenging times, and no prologue is necessary. I understand you have heard my December 4th bible study on Church Government. It was not an official statement of church policy, but an earnest attempt to help the members in understanding Godly government. I am imploring you to please take up this study with me, and let us labor together in overcoming our human nature and develop a clear understanding of church government.

Central to everything we stand for as God's called out people at this time is the government of God. We understand that God is in the process of restoring His government to the earth, and the Church is fundamental to that purpose. We have been forced to consider government since shortly after Mr. Armstrong died and the one appointed by him to lead the church began to move doctrine off-base. We were forced to leave that organization after all appeals for doctrinal integrity fell on deaf ears. We abandoned a rigid authoritarian form of government and embraced a more open form only to see that we had amongst us people who wanted to use the council form of government to push forward their own agendas. We abandoned that failed attempt to govern ourselves and formed the current system which we thought at the time would be styled on one person being the leader but that he would work with a board in a collaborative manner. We wanted to correct the errors of the previous two opposing forms of government.

As a church pastor with a focus toward the shepherd role within God's government, I began to focus on this issue of government style more as I pastored over dwindling congregations. Why were we not growing? Why were all the other groups similarly not growing? Was there a common denominator that was causing God to withhold His blessings? In 2009, as I wrestled with these questions, I wrote two articles which began to focus more on the nature of God's government, accepting that we had the correct structure. These articles were published in the Church of God News.

In the August, 2009 edition of CGN, the first article entitled The Way of God's Government, I said this:

"Because the Church is an organization made up of physical people seeking to be led by God's Spirit, it must have structure in accordance with scriptural principles. God's governmental structure is hierarchical. This is scriptural and is therefore doctrinal. The Church of God has a hierarchical structure of organization, not because we prefer it, or because we want to be different from others. We operate the way we do because to do otherwise would contravene clear biblical teaching. However, hierarchical structure of and by itself does not automatically reflect the government of God. Many worldly governing bodies have such a structure. To be godly the structure must function according to the right way of government. In addition to the correct structure, it is the character of that government that makes it God's government."

This article was followed by part 2 in October of 2009. Again, the concept of the nature of God's government was the focus:

"The final aspect that we need to consider regarding God's government is the interaction between those who govern and those being governed. An essential element of man's government is the

tendency to "lord it over them and those who are great exercise authority over them" (Matthew 20:25). In God's Church, those who are given authority must exercise that authority with a footwashing attitude. Christ said they must view themselves as servants or slaves (Matthew 20:26-27). They are to lead by example, with their actions indicating the true nature of government. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). What about those who are being governed? Unlike human government, God's government requires voluntary, willing submission. The only authority anyone in the Church has over us is that to which we choose to submit. Our willingness to submit to God and to His authoritative administration is a large part of the demonstration of the way of godly government in a godless world."

With the September, 2001 and January, 2002 editions, two more articles on the nature of government were published. They represented my developing thinking on the subject. At that time, you as the publisher of CGN had no objection to addressing the nature of God's government.

At that point, I had not yet seen that the entire spectrum of how government and authority in the church is laid out clearly in scripture. As the marriage and family model for church government became clearer to me I spoke of it in a few sermons. One such sermon I gave in Pasadena at the end of November, 2009 and that was sent out on the sermon distribution program. The title was "Generative Authority." In that sermon I addressed authority and authoritarianism. There was nothing new in this week's Bible study, except that I pulled it all together in a specific way. My wrestling with this subject was very public and met with no disapproval from you.

I do not believe that God is working equally amongst numerous organizations which go by a COG name. Scripture does not support that. But I do believe that there are many of God's people scattered throughout the various organizations – being where they are for many different reasons. They are members of the Body who need to be attached to the One who calls Himself, "the good Shepherd." Our purpose surely should be to guide all members to the "door of the sheep." It is through that door that we build a relationship with Christ, and in Him we find the Father; The purpose of God's government at work.

Hopefully my tone is humble and my heart is soft, because I believe it is and I am praying and fasting to that end. I have remained submitted to your authority, but I must ask you to please consider that we might not be practicing God's government properly. The current strife in the Church is a direct result of our failure – a failure shared by all of us – in the application of the family model of mutual submission in the administration of this organization. I have sinned in this respect, and am working to identify, repent of, and turn from these shortcomings. At the same time, I am convinced that you too have fallen short. There is no more powerful way to preach the Gospel and honor God's name than if you will soften your heart, acknowledge wrong doing, and work to serve the flock in an ethic of redemption and reconciliation.

We have the opportunity now to get it right. This issue of government is central to God's way. When we as His people actually get it right, we will be the bride that Christ is waiting on. We CAN do this. We HAVE to do this. Let's lift the church onto a plateau, above the fray so to speak, by addressing and putting in place, the hierarchical model of Father, Christ, man and woman. A model that expresses God's government as a loving authority that, "creates, enlarges, and makes to grow." If we build the correct government model, the sheep will hear His voice and they will come.

Nobody wants your position, and we do not envy your challenging task. We want you to lead the church into a right relationship with God.

With this in mind, I ask you to please call a council of elders meeting, bringing all the church pastors together. Let us do this in the manner and spirit of Acts 15. As then, the issues are contentious and sharp between us. However, under God's government model with mutual submission and the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, our problems can be resolved and the church restored to unity and peace.

The situation is in your hands, under God's will. I do not seek to rebel against God or whatever governmental structure He dictates. But I am bound to protect His people and defend truth. I am praying for God's correction if I am wrong, laboring to repent of whatever failings I have contributed to this matter, and seeking reconciliation with you, my brother. Please turn with me and the many brethren who have joined with us in prayer and fasting, and let us together put His name, His purpose, and His people above all our human frailties before more damage is done.

In love and God's service,

Brian