

Vol. 12, Issue 4, Aug 2009

The Way of God's Government

By Brian Orchard

One of the greatest events that will occur at the beginning of the next age will be the establishment of the government of God on earth—a government we have been called to administer under Jesus Christ at His return.

As those who will assist in that future administration, we need to understand the *nature* of the government that will bear rule, as that will impact the way we will rule in the Millennium. And today, understanding the nature of God's government will help illuminate whether government in the context of the Church is a doctrinal or simply an administrative matter.

Government Now and in the Future

Let's back up and consider the big picture for a moment. We understand a great deal about government from the book of Daniel. In the second chapter we see that God caused Nebuchadnezzar to have a dream. That this dream was given to the king of Babylon is significant, because at that time the Babylonian Empire was the current world power. Its control included the nation of Judah, which is why Daniel became involved with the interpretation of the dream.

The vision was of a vast image, or statue. Its metallic appearance was awesome: head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. God revealed the meaning of the dream through Daniel. In so doing, He demonstrated first to Nebuchadnezzar that He, God, exists in heaven. The point was that there exists a higher power than the greatest ruler on earth. As the dream is interpreted, it becomes obvious that the different metal parts of the statue represent successive kingdoms, or governments.

Beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, there would be successive kingdoms that would bear influence over the earth by ruling over people as Nebuchadnezzar did. In today's language we would more commonly refer to them as empires or international unions. These are governments that would bear rule and authority over nations of people on earth. Historically, we can see the evidence of this truth revealed by God to Daniel.

The final aspect of this dream shows that a great stone struck the statue on the feet and crushed it into dust, which was then blown away by the wind. This stone in turn became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. The mountain represents the kingdom of God that will rule over all other kingdoms. The purpose of the dream was to reveal God's government as ultimately world-ruling. The government of God is the ruling aspect of the kingdom of God.

The Church Represents the Government of God Now

An inescapable connection is that the Church, begun by Christ on Pentecost, 31 C.E., represents the government of God on earth today. The Church of God does not operate as a world-ruling body, nor as a government composed of spirit beings as implied by Daniel's interpretation of the dream. Those aspects are for the future. However, the physical people who have God's Spirit as a part of their being and thus form the Body of Christ—the Church—have had their allegiance shifted from one government to another. The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Colossae, explained this:

The Father . . . has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us [drawn us out] from the power of darkness and conveyed [transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1:12-13).

Although still physical, Church members live under the terms and conditions of the kingdom of God. In the past, we have described this condition as the Church being the embryonic kingdom of God—a reference to the growing and

developing that prepares us for future rulership in God's kingdom when it is established over the earth.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong came to understand that the Church is a spiritual organism, aided in its work by a corresponding physical organization. As such it is a forerunner of the kingdom or government of God on earth today.

The key to understanding God's government is to understand its nature—its character, constitution and essential traits.

Human Government Versus God's Government

The nature of God's government is quite different from the nature of human government. Confusing or mixing the two by trying to view the administration of God's government through the lens of human government, with all of its imperfections and problems, will lead to serious errors in judgment.

Government is the authoritative administration of the affairs of state. It is the control, direction and restraint exercised over man in his community life. This definition is true for both man's and God's forms of government.

But human government is fundamentally flawed in two ways.

First, man's natural mind resists control, direction and restraint. Modern minds are especially programmed to resist authoritative administration. This resistance rejects the very laws that are designed to bring happiness. God is a loving authority, and His laws express that love. However, our natural mind "is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). If man rejects God's benevolent laws, then he is left with one course of action—he must make his own laws. He therefore devises his own methods of control, direction and restraint. This approach is demonstrated well by a recent British newspaper article, which stated, "When law is out of step with society, it deserves reform" (*London Times*, March 11, 2009). Is it really the *law* that needs reform, or does societal behavior need reform? Sometimes it is both, but in the case referred to in the *London Times*, it was associated with weakening the sanctity of marriage. And we know where that mind-set comes from.

The second flaw is that the human mind is wired to misuse authority. The simple rule of human nature is self first! Paul explained to Timothy that “in the last days . . . men will be lovers of themselves” (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

This is not new, but unfortunately we are witness to the fact that many who administer the affairs of state abuse their authority for selfish reasons. Man-made laws are often unjust, and when self-centered people administer those laws, we have a recipe for acting contrary to what is right and just.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan (Proverbs 29:2).

Unfortunately, over the years some have viewed the government in the Church in the same way they view the methods man uses to govern himself. But God’s government is quite different.

First, we are not given authority to make law. God’s law is predetermined, and we either accept it or reject it.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you (Deuteronomy 4:2).

Second, in God’s government our role is an administrative role only. God has created just laws, which are expressions of who He is and how His love is expressed. We come to know God through spiritual obedience to His law. We are being trained in the authoritative administration of those laws. Therefore, those who are to justly administer God’s laws must themselves *be* just!

... He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God (2 Samuel 23:3).

If God’s laws reflect love toward God and love toward fellow man, then the administrators of those laws within the government of God must themselves be living examples of love toward God and fellow man.

The Critical Element: Our Attitude

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.

Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesus reinforces this. Different roles and responsibilities are designated within the Church, creating a hierarchical structure. Paul focuses on what that organizational structure is meant to achieve. Its purpose is "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

The authoritative administration of the affairs of state is designed under God's government to produce godliness and Christ-likeness. The control, direction and restraint are benevolent. This is a totally different nature than man's way of governing. Paul then continues by describing our personal responsibility in the matter of governing.

. . . 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 (Ephesians 4:16).

Our personal attitude toward government is at the center of governmental effectiveness. In other words, God's government within the Church today is only effective

- when it is administered by just people,
- when the principles administered are just,
- when we voluntarily submit to those entrusted with administrative roles.

All of this can be summarized by the attitude, as Paul indicated, of “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21).

We are called by God to learn the administration of His law. Government is therefore central to our calling and presence in the Church—the Body of Christ—and is clearly an essential teaching to guide us now in the Church and to govern our attitude and actions in the future when we rule with Christ.

Having the correct structure is not enough. With that structure we must then continue to develop the true way of God’s government. Learning and applying this now will increase our effectiveness as a Church in this age and prepare us for our roles in the next age.

<◆>