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The Way of God's Government, Part 2

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We cannot consider the multifaceted role of God's Church without considering the function of government. One main objective of God's Church is to be a training ground for the preparation and training of people who will, as spirit beings, assist in the administration of God's government. Unfortunately there is no role model in this world for learning about godly governance. An ever-present danger, then, is to instill aspects of human government, with which we are familiar, into our developing understanding of God's government.

Is the concept of a kingdom, and hence government, something that only has a future application? When we examine the development of the house of Jacob, we can see that in the past God has embedded the concept of kingdom and government into the human realm. This concept continues in the present, and will carry on into the future.

When an angel revealed to Mary that she would produce a child whose name would be Jesus, the angel made a declaration involving past, present and future government:

'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:32-33).

Israel's Failure to Represent God

The house of Jacob (also known as Israel) refers to his descendants, named the house of Israel (Jeremiah 2:4).

The house of Israel was organized into a nation and a kingdom at Mount Sinai. When the nation entered into a covenant relationship with God, He told them that they were to be a special people, because they would represent God and His way of life to the world. They would become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). God presented His law to this newly formed nation as the central body of belief.

So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words [laws] which the Lord commanded him (Exodus 19:7).

Law regulates the conduct and action of human life. It is a rule of action established by a recognized authority that has the power to enforce it. Government is nothing other than the authoritative administration of the affairs of state. In this case, God is the king or ruler and His law directs those within His government.

God delegated authority within this kingdom to administer His laws. Hence God's government was established among a physical people. Though a physical nation, the house of Jacob was to be a full working model of God's government. It was to be an example to all the nations.

From the beginning, Israel failed miserably to provide such an example. Though they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years to learn the lesson of obedience, they demonstrated to the other nations their own moral failure. Eventually they rejected God as king over them and demanded their own physical monarch (1 Samuel 8). Warning them that human kings would abuse them, God granted their demand. They suffered for centuries as king after king misused his authority and led the people into rejection of God's law and authority over them. From the very people God set up to demonstrate the kingdom and government of God came a terrible example, which ultimately denigrated God in the eyes of other nations.

The Church Represents God's Government

This is where the story becomes personal to us in God's Church today. Like the house of Israel, the Church today is regarded as the spiritual successor of the church in the wilderness. The eleventh chapter of Romans covers this in detail. God has not cast off Israel forever, but at this time the elect have obtained a personal relationship with God, while physical Israel languishes. God as the original king has reestablished His kingdom as a spiritual type within His Church. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9).

It is not the kingdom in fullness, because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. However, the Church has God's law as its central body of belief, and has the authority to administer that law within the Church "kingdom" (Matthew 16:18-19). The laying on of hands delegates authority and responsibility within the Body to edify the spiritual maturity of the kingdom's subjects.

On a broader scale, the Church is to learn to govern in the way demonstrated by its Head, Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah declared regarding Christ's leadership qualities, He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. . . . He will bring forth justice for truth. . . . till He has established justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 42:3-4).

God's government is to be a just government displaying the just qualities of Christ.

Behold a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice. . . . [When] the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, . . . then justice will dwell in the wilderness (Isaiah 32:1, Isaiah 32:15-16).

God's government within His Church is the administration of justice. Justice refers to the administration of what is just—what is morally right.

Administering God's Government

The determination of what is right and what is wrong, and who does the administering, are the areas that can cause government within the Church to become problematic. We must not inject man's concepts of justice into the administration of government in the Church. The way of God's government is different than the way of man's government.

Man has created a body of law upon which he has formed a system of justice. This is based upon the concept of justice attributed to Aristotle: "Human beings are uniquely endowed by nature with the ability to form the concept of justice." We know which tree this concept comes from, and it tells us that man determines for himself what is just. In his book *The Myth of Moral Justice*, Thane Rosenbaum gives an overview of how Aristotle's ideas have turned out:

The legal system's notion of justice is served by merely finding legal facts without also incorporating the moral dimensions of emotional and literal truth.

Rosenbaum is saying that man's concept of justice is based on laws apart from any religious values of what is morally right and wrong.

In contrast, God's way of government involves a different mind-set regarding law and the authoritative administration of that law. First, individuals have no authority to determine standards of personal conduct. It is God who determines what is just and right.

The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. . . .
The Lord is our Lawgiver (Isaiah 33:5, Isaiah 33:22).

Human nature does not want any authority telling it what is right and wrong; it wants to determine what is right and just for itself. Man's natural mind hates both what is truly just and justice itself. The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

God's law is about relationships; man's law is not. Referring to man's law, Rosenbaum noted, "Law is not about the repair of relationships, the moral duties owed to or shared by our fellow human beings." This view cannot be applied to God's law, which is all about those relationships and moral duties. Not understanding the important differences between man's law and God's law can lead to attitude problems towards those entrusted with the authoritative administration of that law. If we within the Church say, "I will never have one man rule over me," we are emulating a worldly mentality.

Building and Nurturing Relationships

The nature of God's government is the building and nurturing of relationships. God's law is all about relationships: first, toward God; and second, toward our neighbor. It therefore follows that godly government is designed to protect what is just and encourage Church members in the

pursuit of those relationships. Those entrusted with the oversight of administration must themselves have a relationship with God and a deep love for their fellow man. This was certainly the intention of God's government in ancient Israel. Looking ahead to the time when Israel would have a physical king, Moses said that the king would be required to write out God's law so 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 to the left (Deuteronomy 17:19-20).

The king's dispensation of justice was to be based on his relationship with God, his fidelity to what was morally right and wrong, and his love for those over whom he had responsibility. There is no system outside of God's Church that has this as the basis of its government.

Service and Submission

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.

We have been called into the Church to learn about the government of God and how it works, for the purpose of ruling with Christ after He sets up the kingdom of God over the whole earth. A major role for the Church today is to demonstrate the true nature of God's government as a witness to the world prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

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