

The Principles of God's True Government

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Greetings again everyone, and welcome to all of those who will be listening eventually. We have brethren getting tapes and CD's and DVD's, in South Africa and Australia and England, and then in Canada and the US.

Years ago, the church stressed very, very heavily, one subject. It was to the point that I can remember members coming up to me and saying, "I am so tired of hearing about church government." And I think in years past we've beaten the subject to death, but I believe that in many cases, we got it wrong, as we talked about last time in the sermon regarding Acts 15. We covered last time what Acts 15 has to say about church government, and the kind of government that was in place at that time. Today we want to continue in that vein, and we want to talk about the principles of God's true government, which is the title of the sermon. We want to see what the basic, fundamental principles are that should guide the government of God, certainly in this New Testament era and certainly as we get closer to the end days.

The first and foremost, point number one – the basis of God's government is one thing, and we cannot forget that – it is obvious when you read the New Testament.

1. The basis of God's government is love.

If it's anything other than that, it's wrong. God's government is not based on men's ideas, it is not based on power and authority. God's government is not based on the whims of individuals. God's government is based on love, and we have to understand that. In many cases today, as well as times in the past, various leaders, various groups, have gone astray by getting away from that basic, fundamental concept. Let's look at Matthew chapter 22 – we're going to cover some very basic scriptures. Christ was very plain about what the basis of government should be. It not only forms the basis of government, but the basis of our relationship with one another, and the basis of obviously our relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Matthew 22, and we'll begin in verse 36. If somebody asked Christ, came up to Christ in a room and said, "What's the greatest commandment?", I think all of our ears would perk up – we would pay very close attention. That is recorded here for our benefit.

Matthew 22:36-39 - Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?
37) Jesus said to him, " *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* "

38) This is *the* first and great commandment.

39) And *the* second is like it: '*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*'

What He's saying is, the degree that we love ourselves, that same degree should be applied in our love toward other people. Very simple and very basic. Verse 40:

Matthew 22:40 - On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

Everything is based on these two commandments. We have to say to ourselves, "When are we going to get it?!" There are people who are getting it – there are people who understand it. But for decades, I am sad to say, I didn't get it. I was focused on a lot of other things, but not focused on this to the degree that I should have been. Christ makes it very, very plain. Now, did the disciples and the apostles ignore that after Christ was crucified, dead and buried, and was resurrected? Did they continue in that manner, or did they go off into another area and refocus into something different, as sometimes we have in the past?

Let's go to I John chapter 3. John was right beside Jesus Christ, he heard Christ, and he had now been through decades of the formation of the New Testament church, and notice what he writes. He is not drifting to a different area – he has not changes his focus. Notice what he says, I John 3 and verse 1 just to set the context

I John 3:1 - Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

So he is telling us, that God first loved us, as scriptures tell us. And the subject is love – God first loved us, to call us, to give us His Spirit, convert us. Now look at verse 14.

I John 3:14 - We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.

What a concept! This is a yardstick of our conversion, of our status with God Almighty. We know whether we are heading for death, or we're heading for life, by how much we love the brethren. That is what this says. You have passed, made the transition, from death to life if you love the brethren. All too often we were concerned about status, prestige, climbing a ladder, getting a title, doing all of that, and we ignored this. And he goes on to say:

I John 3:14 - He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.

It is sad to see what is going on among the various greater Churches of God today, where groups are shooting ICBM's at each other. Individuals are saying horrible things about each other. If you read the scriptures, if we begin to do that and we really mean

it, and there is hate in our heart, we are abiding in death. We cannot do that. Certainly this fellowship can't do that. No matter what stones are hurled at us, we can't return evil with evil. We cannot go after somebody to "get even". You return evil with one thing, the bible is very clear, you return evil with good. IF somebody does evil to you, you return good back to them. Verse 15:

I John 3:15 - Whoever hates his brother is a murderer...

Christ said that on the sermon on the Mount. John is saying exactly the same thing decades later.

I John 3:15 - ...and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

What he is saying is, if we have hate for a brother or a sister in the church, we are murderers and we are in danger of losing our eternal life. I have heard some things here recently, where people have said things, even from the pulpit, that have hate in their heart. Hate toward other people. We are on very thin ice if we allow ourselves to get in that mode. Verse 16:

I John 3:16 - Hereby we know the love of God...

In this next phrase he tells us what the love of God is...

I John 3:16 - ...because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

This is something that should be all encompassing in the government of God. The government should be based on one brother laying down his life for a brother. The leaders, the elders, laying down their lives for the brethren, the brethren laying down their lives for the elders and leaders. That should be the basis – it is love. It is nothing else but love. Let's go over to the next chapter, I John 4, and we'll begin in verse 10. John has a lot to say about this – he is not letting this subject go. He's not giving it a lick and a promise, as we would say today – he is dwelling on it, and hammering it home.

I John 4:10 - In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us...

He loved us first, Christ died before we were ever born.

I John 4:10-11 - ...and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

It's obvious. If God **is** love, not that he has love, but he **is** love, then we should follow in those footsteps. Let's jump to verse 16.

I John 4:16 - And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

I love the way John writes, because he has very short, very clear sentences, and his concepts are very easy to understand. There is no argument here. Since God is love, and if God dwells in us, then we will exhibit love not only back to God, but to one another. Verse 21:

I John 4:21 - And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

And yet I have seen people say, "Oh, I love God!" and then they turn around and they say bad things about their brother, they try to make their brother stumble, they try to politic to get their brother to be diminished in some way. And yet they say they love God. What John is saying is, no you don't – you don't love God as much as you think you do. On the one hand you say you love God, but then you treat your brother that way.

Summarizing the first point, let's understand that the foundation, the basis, the overriding characteristic of God's government is love. We cannot ignore that, we cannot get away from that, and it should permeate everything we do, every decision we make as a fellowship, every direction we take as a church, what we say and do in personal relationships. This must be based on the benefit of others. We should be living sacrifices for others – we cannot forget that.

This second point is something that has been grossly ignored and frankly, blatantly ignored down through the decades.

2. God's government is designed to treat all people equally.

That has not been true in the main. Let's understand that. We're going to see some scriptures in a step by step understanding of the fact that all of God's people must be treated equally. Let's go to Romans 2 and verse 11, and see a characteristic of God. If we say we love God with all of our heart and we want to follow God, then we must indeed emulate Him in our conduct.

Romans 2:11 - For there is no partiality (respect of persons) with God.

What that says is there is no favouritism with God. God doesn't view His children in the sense that He has a favourite son or a favourite daughter. We are all treated equally and loved equally. There is no respect of persons with God.

Let me ask you a question – wouldn't it seem logical then, if there is no respect of persons with God, then God's government as its administered should not have respect

of persons toward any individual, and treat all people equally? If that's the way God behaves, shouldn't God's government behave the same way? Shouldn't God's government not view some with rose-colored glasses, and view others through dark sunglasses? Or should God's government view everybody and treat everybody the same?

For example, and we won't turn there as it's a basic memory scripture, but Romans 3:23:

Romans 3:23 - All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

With that in mind, let's go to Colossians 3 and verse 25. God is very clear – He doesn't allow some people to sin and get away with it, and then others, the axe comes down over their neck very quickly and very fast. Remember, we are all sinned.

Colossians 3:25 - But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality [respect of persons] with God.

God frowns on a government that allows some people to get away with things, and yet someone else over here does exactly the same thing and they're hammered for it. That has happened in the past. Back in the days of Worldwide, there were ministers who did things they ought not to have done, regarding little children. Those were winked at. They were transferred. And that should not have happened. That is respect of persons. That's a horrible example, I know, but it's a true example.

In the Old Testament, God also told the judges and the kings that there should be no respect of persons with regard to judgment. Look at II Chronicles chapter 19. Even in the Old Testament, not having God's Spirit, God admonished them as you cannot have favoritism. God's government has to apply equally to all. II Chronicles 19 and verse 1 – talking about Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah.

II Chronicles 19:1 - Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem.

Notice what he did, look at verse 5.

II Chronicles 19:5-6 - Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city,
6) and said to the judges, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who *is* with you in the judgment.

This isn't your judgment, you're judging on behalf of God. If you allow God to do so, He will be with you in the judgment. Verse 7:

II Chronicles 19:7 - Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do *it*, for *there is* no iniquity [injustice] with the LORD our God, no partiality [respect of persons], nor taking of bribes.

With God, everybody receives absolute justice, according to His perfect vision, His perfect discernment, His perfect wisdom. He does not respect persons. If somebody sins, He doesn't care who it is, there is a penalty to pay – there is a cost to be extracted, there is a scar as a result of that sin. God doesn't wink at one person and say, "Well you can go ahead and do that" and hammer somebody else. In administering God's government on this earth, we can't do that either.

What about the New Testament? Let's go to I Timothy 5 and verse 21. Paul is instructing a minister, a young man. If you read between the lines in I and II Timothy, Timothy had a lot of problems – in part because of his age, and maybe in part because of inexperience. He was left alone and Paul wasn't by his side. There were some problems that he faced and Paul had to give him admonishment and encouragement and instruction.

I Timothy 5:21 - I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...

That is a strong statement. He doesn't say, "Well if you get around to it, you might want to think about this, this is an idea..."

I Timothy 5:21 - I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice [preferring one before another], doing nothing with partiality.

That is a very clear statement. And if the ministry can't do this, then shame on the ministry. If a minister can't judge without partiality then shame on him. He should not be in that position. This is a very clear scripture.

Now let's jump over to James chapter 2. This is the set of scriptures if you want to focus on respect of persons. This is very, very clear. This is the half brother of Jesus Christ speaking – he was the presiding elder at the Jerusalem Church. He was martyred in 62 AD roughly. He was called James the Just because he was fair and he was just and he didn't violate God's law. If you read some of the histories, that was some of his reputation.

James 2:1 - My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality [respect of persons].

This was a major subject, this was something he was concerned about, because apparently it had started even back then.

James 2:2 - For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

And we would say today, if somebody came into church and he pulls up in a Mercedes or a Cadillac and he's wearing \$500 shoes, and a \$2,000 suit and some jewelry, and his wife with him, and he walks in with a \$500 briefcase. And then somebody else walks in who looks like a bag person, pushing a grocery cart, with clothes that maybe haven't been washed in awhile, maybe a little body odor. Maybe unshaven if it was a man, or disarrayed. You have these two contrasting individuals walk into your church, your meeting area. He's painting a black and white picture here, as clear in the contrast as you can get. Verse 3:

James 2:3 - and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"

Well here, as we have tables, it would be like making them sit under one of the tables. Verse 4:

James 2:4 - have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

You're looking at the outward appearance – you're looking at their clothing. You don't know their heart, you don't know their thoughts, you don't know their deeds. Yet you're making judgments. Verse 5:

James 2:5 - Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

I Corinthians 1:26 talks about the weak of the world. Verse 6:

James 2:6 - But you have dishonored the poor man.

He used this example, but he's telling them here in verse 6, "YOU have despised the poor". Apparently that was going on at that time in Jerusalem.

James 2:6 - ...Do not the rich oppress you...

The politicians, the business leaders – just turn on the news any day and they're stealing millions, politicians are partial in their treatment of people.

James 2:6-7 - ...Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?
7) Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

Use God's name in vain, exalt themselves above God, etc. Verse 8:

James 2:8-9 - If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself,*" you do well;

9) but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

If you have respect of persons you commit sin – it can't get any more plain than that. Verse 10:

James 2:10 - For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

He is saying, "Look, if you have respect of persons you are just as guilty as committing murder, or lying and committing adultery." Yet, we have seen, time and time again, where people were treated with partiality in God's church. Going back to the Worldwide days and carrying up through this day. I know people who receive VIP treatment in various groups because they were big tithe payers. They got invited to places, they got invited out to dinner, they got invited to special events, they got invited to conferences because they were big tithe payers, and that's all. **Preferential treatment.** We had an issue at the Feast a couple of years ago – somebody wanted a reserve seat. No reason for it, nobody was handicapped, nobody had a specific job that they had to be in a certain location at the Feast, but this person **insisted** on having a reserved seat. And guess what? He got it. That is partiality. If anyone gets a reserved seat it should be somebody on crutches, or somebody that's handicapped, or somebody that's weak and feeble – they should get the reserved seats.

I've heard people make the comment, "Well she's just a woman, what do you expect?" – that is partiality, and that is wrong. Or I've heard it say, "Well that's old so and so", as if that's all you can expect from him. So you dismiss what the man says, because it's old so and so. On the receiving end, I can't tell you the number of times it's been said, "Well he's just a local elder.", as though somehow since you're **just** a local elder, you can't have a sane thought in your head. "Well he never went to Ambassador College", as though you can't form a sentence unless you did go there. **Respect of persons.** This second principle of God's government is that we have to treat everybody the same. We have to treat everybody without partiality. That puts the burden on all of us. We can sit here and complain about Worldwide or other groups, but if we do it ourselves in our everyday conduct, then shame on us. We are hypocrites if we complain about other people, and yet we do it ourselves. We have to be very careful in our thought processes, our tone of voice, in the amount of time we spend with this person versus that person. We have to be very careful that even in little things, that we don't show respect of persons, because God's people are God's people. And God values every

one highly, as we're going to see in a little bit. So who are we to put one up here and another one down here. Shame on us if we do that, and if we do, we might not be in the Kingdom of God as individuals. And certainly in our church, in our fellowship, we can never do that. We just have to watch it diligently and vigorously. We all need to look to ourselves as individuals and determine to show and treat all people with equal respect. Our brothers and sisters deserve our respect.

A third point, and frankly one that has been ignored down over the decades. This is probably the most violated principle in God's government over the decades.

3. God's government was designed to be self-policing.

If God's government is administered properly it will be self-policing. What do I mean by that? We have beat these two scriptures to death, but we're going to go to them again. We're going to go to them with the understanding that we're talking about God's government being **self-policing**. It doesn't need a police force! It doesn't need someone with a whip and a chair or a gun, because God's government polices itself – God's people police themselves. Matthew chapter 5, verses 22 through 24. This covers the instance where you know somebody has something against you. You can tell by their body language, by their tone of voice, by the fact that they don't call or don't come to see you, or turn away from you at church. There is a problem.

Matthew 5:22 - But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Verse 23 starts out with "therefore", which means it is referring to verse 22, "Because of this..."

Matthew 5:23 - Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

What do you do? Just bury it, and ignore it? Do you pretend that it doesn't exist and that it'll go away? That too often is what happens. People ignore and they just refuse to deal with it. They don't want conflict and get into an uncomfortable situation, so they pretend that it doesn't exist. I can't tell you the number of times I've talked to people, ministers particularly, and say "Look, you need to go talk to this guy. You **need** to talk to him!" and it didn't happen. Verse 24 – Look at the sense of urgency.

Matthew 5:24 - leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Don't wait – even for a gift to God. You drop what you're doing and you go to your brother. It is that important, it's that urgent. And so if we do that, then God's government becomes self-policing. If you know somebody has a problem with you, you go to them and you talk to them about it. Then it's nipped in the bud. It doesn't become some giant problem. It also stops gossip in its tracks. There is no gossip because you go and talk to them directly. What happens in the church, when you know somebody has something against you, guess what happens? You go talk to everybody else **but** the person, justifying yourself, etc. We've all been there, we've all done that. But God's government is designed to be self-policing. Let's go to Matthew 18 and look at the other side of the story. This is where we know somebody has something against us because of something we've done. This talks about somebody who sins against us. Very familiar scriptures, but again, let's look at it in the light of God's government being self-policing.

Matthew 18:15 - Moreover if your brother sins against you...

This assumes guilt. This is not something that is imagined, or maybe did or didn't happen. This is assuming guilt.

Matthew 18:15 - ...go and tell him his fault between you and him alone...

If we really did this in the church, which we don't and haven't, but if we really did this, this would stop about 95-99% of all the interpersonal problems. Go alone, in a humble attitude I might add, and say, "Look, last Sabbath you said something that really offended me. You said something that really hurt my feelings. Can we talk about it?" Not yelling and screaming, no veins standing out, no spittle going out, you just sit and talk. You go over in a quiet corner and you say, "You said this last Sabbath, and it really hurt me." And 99 times out of 100, the person will either say, "Did I say that? I don't think I really said that. But if I did, I'm sorry and I apologize." and the other person could ask for clarification, "Well I took that to mean this....", and so you see that there is a misunderstanding. And then the person says "Well I love you, I don't have anything against you." and the other person says, "Well I love you too, and I don't want any trouble between us." And guess what, the problem is solved. It doesn't go any further than that. But that so rarely happens in God's church.

I can remember 15-20 years ago, counseling a lady, and she was all upset that this person said something about her, and she had been not sleeping for about a week. She was so upset about it, and it just tore her up. She had a soft heart. I asked if she'd gone and talked to this other lady. She said that she hadn't and she couldn't. I said, "Yes you can, and you have to. You don't have an option. Here's what the Bible says." It's hard, it's hard to do. But I told her, "You must do this. You're not sleeping at night, you're having wrong thoughts, you have to stop it." So she did, and she called me up a

couple of days later and said that everything was fine. It was her misunderstanding and they both apologized, and everything was now fine. But people don't do that. And sometimes years go by, decades! And there is still something between two people, and it just doesn't get resolved.

Going on here in verse 15...

Matthew 18:15-16 - ...If he hears you, you have gained your brother.
16) But if he will not hear...

In other words, if he blows you off, "Oh you're just overly sensitive. You've always been a hypocrite", etc.

Matthew 18:16 - But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more...

Two witnesses. But the key is, you don't take people who are on your side. You don't take your best friends, and now it's ganging up three to one. That's what often happens. You take two impartial witnesses, people who do not have an axe to grind, so that this person who now has three people walking in the door, at least feels a little comfortable that he'll get a fair hearing.

Matthew 18:16-17 - ...take with you one or two more, that *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

17) And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church....

In years past, going back to Worldwide and even continuing to this day, we had a situation here two or three months ago, where I was told by an individual that this means the ministry. That is not what it says. It is "Ecclesia", that means the brethren. You take it to the church. We've never done that to my knowledge. And if he neglects to hear the church....

Matthew 18:17 - ...let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

So you see, if this is followed, God's government becomes self-policing. There's not a Gestapo, there's not a system of spies or tattle-tales, and that has all happened in God's church in the past. So let's understand that if Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 are properly applied, then it generally, it's been my observation, that at least 90-99% will be solved by the initial meeting of the first two people. And only rarely, extremely rarely, will it go beyond that to witnesses and then before the whole church. In both Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, the problem can be solved between two brethren, and it is their individual responsibility to do so. I'm telling all of us, and I'm speaking to myself – it is our individual responsibility to obey Matthew 5 and Matthew 18. If we do not do that, then shame on us, and it will be held against us as a sin. We cannot allow that to happen.

Let's look at another situation. Let's go to Galatians 6 and verse 1. This again, is an individual responsibility. This is not laid on the ministry, or the administration in the church – it is laid on each of us as individuals.

Galatians 6:1 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass...

You see somebody sinning, you see somebody out of control, or going off in a wrong direction.

Galatians 6:1 - ...you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [meekness], considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

What that is saying is, if you see somebody going off in a wrong direction, and you know it's a fact, it's not rumor or here-say, you've been personally involved, then it says, "You who are spiritual" meaning you must have the Spirit of God, you must be close to God, you must be praying and studying and fasting regularly, you must be in close contact with God and operate with the mind of Jesus Christ, you go to that individual in humility and say, "Look, I saw you the other day do this, or you said this, and that is clearly in violation of God's law. I'm coming here because I love you and I don't want you to go astray. I've been guilty of sins myself, I've been guilty of going astray myself, and I am coming to you as a brother or a sister, and I want you to know this because I love you and I am concerned about you. Can we talk?" And you talk as adult Christians, not yelling and screaming, but you talk in an effort to win your brother or your sister back. It is an individual responsibility.

Let's look at Acts 17 and verse 11, at another individual responsibility. This is something that applies to all of us, regarding heresy and false doctrine. This is about the Bereans now.

Acts 17:11 - These were more fair-minded [noble] than those in Thessalonica...

So we're seeing that the Bereans had something, were doing something that was correct in God's eyes.

Acts 17:11 - ...in that they received the word with all readiness of mind...

They didn't have blinders on. They were ready to study the scriptures.

Acts 17:11 - ...and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so.

And so it was again an individual responsibility. In this case this church had a wonderful talent, a wonderful gift, a wonderful mode of behavior that they studied their bibles. They understood doctrine, and they understood truth from falsehood. That is an individual responsibility. Now with that in mind, let's go to Romans 16 and verse 17. If we are fluent in the bible and we understand the basic doctrines of the church, and I'm

not saying we have to be a scholar or saying that we have to go to college and study Hebrew and Greek. With all the helps available today, we have an opportunity to know far more than most.

Romans 16:17 - Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

That is an individual responsibility. Let's say somebody comes into a group, and it could be back in the Worldwide days, or it could be today, and somebody comes in and says, and I'll just pick the current heresy, "I've had this revelation, did you know that Christ was not eternal, that He was a created being. Do you understand that? This is a new revelation", and maybe he throws out a few scriptures, or some thoughts or ideas, and then generally what would happen is, that person wouldn't say a thing. But they would go to the minister and say, "Do you know what so and so is saying?" and all of a sudden the minister is sitting here and he becomes the policeman. Applying Matthew 18, that can come after witnesses and being taken to the church and all that, then that can come into play. But initially, what he see here in Acts 17 with the Bereans, what that person should say, to the face of the person who is speaking these "revelations", and don't be afraid or ashamed, "We don't believe that here. I don't believe that. I believe Christ is eternal along with God. So frankly, I don't want to hear it, so that's the end of the discussion with me. Have a nice day, enjoy your meal." And that stops it in its tracks. If that person then went to another person in the same congregation and heard the same thing, and then went to another person and heard the same thing, and after 4 or 5 attempts, one of two things is going to happen. They are either going to shut up, or they are going to leave. Nobody's been disfellowshipped, nobody's had to be reprimanded, the minister doesn't even have to get involved in that sense. It never happens because God's government is supposed to be self-policing. We should feel individually responsible for preserving what we have and for keeping the peace among ourselves. That is an individual responsibility.

One of the reasons we are where we are today, and one of the reasons it is called the Pacific Church of God is that we want to do all that we can to promote peace. We want peace, we are called to peace. Colossians 3:15 tells us that. So if someone comes in, Satan comes in, and tries to destroy the peace, we have an individual responsibility to not let that happen, and to keep peace among ourselves. Matthew 5, Matthew 18, Galatians 6:1, are all designed to keep peace among God's people. Nips controversies in the bud, nips misunderstandings in the bud, and we keep peace among ourselves. So let's understand, the third point is that God's government is indeed self-policing.

4. God's government in the New Testament is a consensus form of government guided by, led by, God's Holy Spirit.

That's what happened in the conference in Acts 15. This was initially followed by the Worldwide Church of God in the 40's and 50's, and then began to change in the 60's. It was followed by other groups, at least when I went to Global initially and talked to the leader there, I was absolutely assured that we would have a consensus form of government. That changed over time. When we formed CGF back in 1999, it was going to be a consensus form of government – that too changed over time. Let's go to Acts chapter 6, and let's see an example that we've overlooked for decades, absolute decades, in God's church. And yet it's there, and I'm going to read it out of the NIV – the first five verses of Acts 6. They had a problem, but notice how the problem was solved – same way it was solved in Acts 15.

Acts 6:1 - In those days when the number of disciples was increasing...

And remember what we talked about last time, their church was multiplying and growing by leaps and bounds.

Acts 6:1 - ...the Hellenistic [Grecian] Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

There was partiality – God's government was not being administered properly. How do you solve it? Verse 2...

Acts 6:2 - So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together...

The church – they didn't make a unilateral decision, they didn't sit on high and pontificate – they got the whole church together and said,

Acts 6:2-3 - ...“It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

3) Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom...

You choose, brethren – we won't do it for you.

Acts 6:3-5 - ...We will turn this responsibility over to them

4) and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

5) This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose...

And then it lists the ones they chose. So guess what? This is a consensus form of government. The apostles took the leadership. They said, “Here's how we're going to solve the problem. We want you to go out and evaluate all the brethren, all the men here in this congregation, and pick men that can handle this problem. Men who are filled with God's Holy Spirit, filled with the fruits of God's Spirit – come back to us and

tell us who they are.” Now, it is obvious that if one of the apostles said, “This guy’s a rotten apple, this guy’s not going to work” then they would be eliminated, but in this case, the ones that they came back to the apostles with were fine. So the apostles went ahead and ordained them as deacons. So we see here that the apostles took the leadership and they made the proposal, but they sought the brethren’s involvement and they sought the brethren’s wisdom. And all were pleased with the result. The brethren bought into it because they helped select. So now, if a deacon is in the church and is over them, they helped pick this guy. So they are buying into the process.

When I was ordained a deacon back in 1969, I was sitting out in the audience and they announced my name – I didn’t have a clue! My jaw was down on my knees! Nobody asked me if I ever wanted to be a deacon. Nobody asked me if I felt like I could handle the job. It just happened! And nobody asked the brethren out in the audience either. There were about 2,500 people there for Spring Holydays in Detroit, and they were as shocked as I was! That’s not what Acts 6 tells us. If we are ordaining deacons and elders, the brethren need to be involved. Let’s go to chapter 8 – talking about a consensus form of government guided by God’s Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 6, everybody was happy – they were all pleased, that’s the way it should be. Now, Acts 8:14.

Acts 8:14 - Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

So the apostles got together and said, “How do we handle this, because this is all new?”. They decided amongst themselves, consensus form of government, and they sent out Peter and John. There wasn’t one head. They got together – we talked about that last time in Acts 15. Look at Acts 11 and verse 22. In this case, it wasn’t the apostles – it was the entire church.

Acts 11:22 - Then news of these things came to the ears of the church...

This is “Ecclesia”, the brethren.

Acts 11:22 - ...in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

So when this news came, the church got together, obviously led by James, the apostle there. But it says “they”, it doesn’t say James. So the church itself had input into what we should do about this. Who should we send, where should he go? And it was discussed openly. There weren’t any secret meetings behind closed doors – you know, cigar filled rooms as they say in politics today. The fact is, if consensus government is going to work, it is up to each individual to have the mind of Jesus Christ, so that God’s

will is done. Because a few rotten apples can blow the bus up. That leads us to point number 5.

5. Consensus government will only work among converted brethren.

That means that all of us have the responsibility to have the mind of Christ, Philippians 2:5. Shame on us if we don't. Because if Satan can use people and stir people up to have his mind, then you're going to have conflict. Consensus won't work – you will have conflict. So the burden is on us, as individuals, to operate with the mind of Christ. Let's go to Matthew chapter 18 and look at verses 18 through 20. It's a very familiar scripture, but let's look at it from the standpoint of a principle of God's government. This follows what we previously read about how to handle interpersonal conflicts.

Matthew 18:18 - Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

This is not talking changing of the Sabbath, as the Catholics have used this verse to claim that they have the authority to change the Sabbath. It is talking about interpersonal decisions, administrative decisions, things like that. Verse 19:

Matthew 18:19-20 - Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

20) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

In the case that we just read, about sending Barnabas to Antioch in Acts chapter 11, the church gets together, and Christ says that if two or three are together He is in the midst of them. So the group gathers together and they pray, and then maybe they fast about it, and they ask God's guidance and God's will, and if they are sincere in that, God's Spirit will lead and guide them in that consensus and then everybody is happy. The ministry takes the leadership, but the fact is, that all buy into the decision and all go forward with that decision.

The question is, Christ is there amidst this group, but do we listen to Him? Do we heed him? Or do we have our own agenda? Do we have our own pet peeve? Are we operating carnally? Has Satan gotten a burr under our saddle and we're going to run the whole bus into the ditch? Because we are not operating through and by God's Holy Spirit.

Consensus government only works among converted brethren. Notice I Peter 5 and verse 5. This is the attitude we should have. Peter is addressing a group of elders, and if you recall in the context, he says, "I'm an elder just like you."

I Peter 5:5 - Likewise you younger people...

Meaning younger in age elders....

I Peter 5:5 - ...submit yourselves to *the older* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another...

Don't exalt the self, don't fight and strive.

I Peter 5:5 - ...and be clothed with humility, for
*"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."*

The word "submit", in "likewise you younger people submit yourselves", and then the next sentence, "all of you be subject" – the word "subject" and "submit" are the same Greek word, Strongs 5293, "Hupotasso", and it means to subordinate or obey. Subordinate yourself, in other words, be lower than the other person, and obey the other person.

Thayer has something interesting about this, because he says that this word "Hupotasso" has a military application and a civilian application. Now for those of you who have been in the military, you will know exactly what I'm talking about.

"It is a Greek military term meaning, 'to arrange in military fashion under the command of a leader'"

Meaning you are arranging the ranks and files. And for those of you who have been in basic training, you know that the sergeants and the officers try to line you up in columns and rows, and there is one maneuver where a command is called out and you put your hand out and it should touch the shoulder of the guy next to you. That means the distance is correct. And then you line yourself up behind the guy who is in front of you. That is what "Hupotasso" means in a military term – you are aligning yourself, you're all in unity, you're all in harmony, you're working together to have straight rows and straight columns.

In a non-military use, Thayer goes on to say,

"It is a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden."

A civilian application means you cooperate, you give in. You are willing to shoulder your own burden, you're willing to take responsibility for your own actions, and you give in to the other person.

So what Peter is saying, is to be subject to one another. Be willing to listen to the other person, be willing to accept their viewpoint, try to walk in their shoes for awhile, and if you do that, we will come to a consensus. We will come in harmony sooner or later if we are operating by God's Holy Spirit. If we are operating carnally, out of vanity and selfishness and strife and being argumentative and wanting our own way, then the wheels will come off the bus pretty quick.

Let's go to Philippians 2 and verse 3 – another admonition about how to make consensus government work. It will only work in the church with converted minds, and in that sense we are trying something new. I don't know if it's been done before, but this is what I see in the bible. This is what I think all of you see in the bible, and we can make it work, because this is apparently what worked in the New Testament. Why can't we make it work here? Philippians 2 and verse 3.

Philippians 2:3 - *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit [strife or vain glory]...

Frankly, this is one reason why we're here, because I have spent years dealing with strife and vain glory, and I am tired of it. Most of you are here because you've seen it too, and you don't want any part of it.

Philippians 2:3 - ...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

If we will do this we will be in unity and harmony and togetherness, if we do this guided by God's Holy Spirit. So consensus government will work with converted minds, because why? Because converted minds are the mind of Christ. If we all have the mind of Christ then we're all going to be in agreement. Does that mean that we agree on every single thing? Of course not, and that's not what I'm talking about. But we will agree on how to proceed, we will agree on choices that need to be made, we will agree on how we should treat one another and love and serve one another. The burden is on us as individuals to have a converted mind.

6. If God's government errs, it should always err on the side of mercy.

Too often God's government erred on the side of harshness. Certainly true in certain areas of the Worldwide days. God's government should always err on the side of mercy. This includes interpersonal relationships, this includes between the minister and the brethren. It's within a family, between parents and children, children and parents. Look at Matthew chapter 9 and verse 13. Christ tells us that He wants mercy. He desires us to have mercy. Because we want mercy from Him! For crying out loud, when we sin we come on our knees in tears and say, "please have mercy on me!". Well

if we want mercy from Him, and that's His mind, shouldn't we have it toward one another? Matthew 9 and verse 13.

Matthew 9:13 - But go you and learn what *this* means: '*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*'...

Sacrifice was the letter of the law. He is saying, "I am showing you a different way, from the heart."

Matthew 9:13 - ...For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

How can we not show mercy to our brother and sister, when we kneel down before God **begging** for His mercy when we screw up? If our brother and sister screws up against us, how can we demand a pound of flesh from them when we don't want God to demand a pound of flesh from us when we sin? Again, respect of persons. Look at Matthew 23 and verse 23. Of course we know Matthew 23 is talking about hypocrisy, and Christ got more upset with religious hypocrisy than anything else, any other sin. He was more beside Himself, more upset with the religious hypocrisy than anything else. Matthew 23 and verse 23:

Matthew 23:23 - Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected [omitted] the weightier *matters* of the law:...

Now what are the weightier matters of the law? The King James says "judgment", the Greek means justice, treating everyone fairly, not being a respecter of persons. But notice the second one, "mercy", and "faith".

Matthew 23:23 -...justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

So the point is, in God's government, and I have learned this the hard way, to my own hurt and other people's hurt I'm sad to say, if you are unsure, and this can be true of parents and children as well. They come to you, they've screwed up and are whining and they don't want the grounding or the punishment or whatever, but it's something you're not sure of, it's not black and white. Err on the side of mercy first. Because I will tell you, in the case of your kids, if you misjudged and you showed mercy when you shouldn't have, guess what they're going to do? They're going to do it again the next day, and they're going to think they can get away with it. Then you can be a little harder and you can come down a little stronger. But in many cases, particularly in the case of a minister, sometimes it's a he said/she said, and you don't know. Or sometimes people are under extreme pressure and tension, or have extreme problems in their life. So if

you're unsure, it's easier to show mercy first. You can always be a little harder down the road. But if you're too harsh in the beginning people get discouraged, people get turned off, and people feel like they don't have a chance. I'm not saying every time, but when you're unsure, if you're going to err, always err on the side of mercy. Harder methods can always come later.

Okay, seventh and last point – this is very important and something we should always keep in mind.

7. God's government should be for the benefit for His people.

That is the purpose of the government, to be a benefit to God's people. But over the decades, somehow God's church has lost that. God's government has been for the exaltation of an individual, God's government has been to support an administration or a hierarchy, rather than for the benefit of the brethren.

I was once at a ministerial conference, one of my first conferences, and there were two or three pastors in this group talking about how they used the ministerial trainees, who have just graduated and come out from college, how they used them for personal service. There was a ministerial trainee, who on a Friday afternoon would go wash the minister's car, mow the yard, the wife would come in and help clean the minister's house, they would babysit their kids. They would do all this personal service! And these men were laughing about it, about who was the toughest. I've seen that in the military, personal services just taken for granted. But this was in God's church. No thought that the poor Ambassador kid, still wet behind the ears, might need to clean his own house, or wash his own car, or take care of his own kids. But they were laughing about it. A man that I highly respected because of what he said, he stood up and confronted them. He walked up, very quietly and peacefully, and they were laughing about all this abuse that they were heaping on these trainees, and he said, "You know, that's funny. I thought God's government was for the benefit of God's people.", and he walked away. And those guys didn't say a word. I don't think they changed their conduct, but they didn't say a word, because they had been convicted.

Look at Matthew 18, beginning in verse 10. We need not to lose sight of the importance of why we're here! And that is to help all of us to be in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 18:10 - Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones...

Respect of persons, abuse...

Matthew 18:10 - ...for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Well if everybody has an angel, and they behold God's face, aren't they all equal?
That's what He's saying. Verse 11:

Matthew 18:11-13 - For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.
12) "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?
13) And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

He gets to the point in verse 14:

Matthew 18:14 - Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish [be lost].

God's government is for the benefit of His people, every single one. The rich, the poor, the healthy, the unhealthy, the lame, the whole – it doesn't make any difference. Young, old, men, women, children – it doesn't make any difference. Look at Isaiah 9 and verse 6 and 7. God's government should be for the benefit, the blessing, of His people. Not to exalt individuals or power, not to exert control.

Isaiah 9:6-7 - For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7) Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

So the fact is, that all we do, as a church, all the decisions that we make, all of our conduct, all of our words, should be for the benefit of God's people and nothing else. Not to exalt the self, not to exert control, not to develop a hierarchy, not to strut around promoting ourselves. What we should do, every word, every deed, every thought and every action we take as a fellowship, should be for the benefit of God's people.

What have we seen today? We've seen that the basis of God's government is love. That must come first. Everything we do should be based on the love of God in our hearts, shed toward our brothers and sisters and shed toward God. God's government

is designed to treat all people equally, no respect of persons, no partiality. God's government is designed to be self-policing, where we are all part of it together, and we help one another, and frankly, we admonish one another if somebody goes astray. God's government in the New Testament is a consensus form of government guided by the Holy Spirit. But we have seen that it will only work with converted brethren. People who are close to God and who are motivated by God's Spirit of love. If you're going to make a mistake, or err and are not sure, err on the side of mercy. Err on the side of love. The final point is that God's government should always be for the benefit of God's people. Not for the harm of God's people, but for their benefit.

And the burden, frankly, is on each one of us to make it happen – each one of us as individuals. It is not the minister's responsibility and everyone else is just passive about it. No, each one of us, it is our responsibility to make this government work, and to do it God's way. In order to do that, we have to change a decades old culture. I've been in the church over 40 years, and things become ingrained, things become habit. We have to change that. It takes time and it takes patience, because sometimes we just knee-jerk react the old way, and shame on us. But we are human, it happens. Let's go to Colossians 3 and verse 13. We must do this toward one another while we are making this transition, trying to eliminate decades of sometimes bad habits. And I am saying this to myself more than anybody. I have had several decades of bad habits.

Colossians 3:13 - forbearing one another...

The Greek means to "put up with". We all have our warts and our zits and our faults and our foibles.

Colossians 3:13 - ...and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.

You apply Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, but you forgive. Willing to forgive at the drop of a hat because you want Christ to forgive us, God to forgive us – we should be willing to do so one for another. It takes time, and we need to be patient with one another. We need to be kind, and we need to be forgiving. Look at Ephesians 4 and verse 32. We are called the Pacific Church of God because we have been called to peace and we desperately want peace. Among ourselves, with other groups, with other individuals.

Ephesians 4:32 - And be kind to one another...

Just as we want Christ to be kind to us.

Ephesians 4:32 - ...tender hearted...

Soft hearted, not harsh, not demanding.

Ephesians 4:32 - ...forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

We need to be patient, kind, gentle, forgiving, while we make this transition to do things what we believe to be God's way. Because at the end of the day, it all boils down to this: Why are we here? What is our mission? What do we want to accomplish? Ministers, members, it makes no difference. We find that in I Thessalonians 2 and verse 19. Paul is saying, "What is my hope? Why am I here? Why am I doing all this?" He tells us in I Thessalonians 2 and verse 19 – think about this.

I Thessalonians 2:19 - For what *is* our hope...

We ask this question – we're a new group, what is our hope?

I Thessalonians 2:19 - ...or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

That is the goal! If each one of us has first and foremost in our minds that we love God with all our heart, and we love our neighbour as ourselves, but our goal in this group, this church, this fellowship, is to make sure that all of us enter into God's Kingdom. We do everything in our power to make sure that each individual without respect of persons is treated in such a way, is helped and guided in such a way, that they are heading toward the Kingdom of God – they are walking down that path toward the Kingdom of God. It is our individual responsibility to do our part to make that happen.

It is critical to understand the government of God and its part in doing that. It is our individual responsibility. God's government is a wonderful blessing – it is not a curse. It is not somebody over us with a whip and a chair, as some people erroneously think. We must individually participate in that government with a converted mind. The burden is on all of us to do just that.

So let's understand the principles of God's true government, and next time we're going to talk about ministerial responsibility and ministerial authority – a very important subject regarding God's true government.

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