

Church Government

Byron Norrod—July 12, 2014

Good morning, everyone! Happy Sabbath! I was asked to give a message today on church government, or the government in the Church of God. I'll give you some of my experiences and lessons that I've learned and see if we can draw any conclusions that might help or be of some benefit.

I was raised in the Worldwide Church of God, and the ministry ruled with an iron fist, with an iron hand! In fact, one minister used to say, 'In the kingdom we'll rule with a rod of iron!' He loved to say just like that! You probably know who I'm talking about. Yet, is that the right perspective? Should we be looking forward to spanking people with a rod of iron, crushing people, harming their lives?

Or should we more probably be looking forward to standing behind somebody, and when they step out of line, in a still small voice saying, 'This is the way, walk you in it'? I like to be chided that way rather than corrected, slapped and spanked!

We're all God's children, and God might spank us from time-to-time to bring us back to Him. I spanked my children, but I never came at them with a rod of iron. I don't think that's really love. Yes, God will use it to correct the nations, and He'll need to do that, because it will take that.

At the end of 1994 we had had enough of Worldwide Church of God leadership—politics, in-fighting, nonsense, garbage—and out pastor at the time told me, 'Byron, stick around, we've got something in the works.' He showed me these two pair of documents of incorporation. They were the beginning things—the fledging documentation—for the Worldwide Church of God Texas. It was the beginning stuff of how United Church of God started. When he handed me these documents I started reading and he didn't expect me to read, he just expected me to have the validation that they had some proof that they had something in the works; and that I shouldn't leave, I shouldn't go with Global Church of God.

I started reading the documents real quickly, and the very first paragraph showed me the hypocrisy of the intent of the ministry, of what they were trying to accomplish. It said something to the effect of:

'So that what has happened in Worldwide Church of God to the ministry that it will never happen again, so that the ministry will not be stuck without a pension and without a paycheck, so that we can continue to our job.'

I was shocked and it probably showed on my face, so the pastor quickly withdrew the documents from my hands.

We fasted and prayed about it, and finally felt led and directed to go to Global Church of God, which later became Living Church of God. In the meantime United CoG had started. David Hulme split off, later another was split off, now there are splits all over the place. These church wars really affect the membership and the children—us, the laity—are the ones who have to choose between which 'parent' to go with. It's really a devastating choice. It's really affected a lot of the people very negatively.

During that time we stumbled across Fred and we would come and visit him whenever he would come, and we really got a lot out of it. But eventually this ministerial rulership that was actually breaking people's lives—the shenanigans, the agendas, the ambition, politics and in-fighting—all had such a deleterious effect on so many people. Of the 144,000 that attended the Feast one time, that we used to like to brag about, how many people are now attending church services? Including the ministry?

Today I would like to talk to you a little bit about God's government in the Church, and I would like to share some lessons I have learned about what government should and shouldn't be from all the church wars.

Who or what should rule in our lives?

Back in Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong created a caste system within the Church. He placed the ministry on a pedestal where they enjoyed undue respect, undue power, and it was a hierarchical top down government that seemed to be effective to control the people. *It was!* It was an institutional government where the governors enjoyed all kinds of benefits, prestige and honor. This led to, unfortunately, demagoguery of authority wielding martinets ruling with strong hands, often times abusing their power, often times destroying people's lives.

I'm going to speak in generalities; not everybody was destroying people's lives. Not everybody was harming the membership. It was so widespread and so many people were affected by it that it was a very sad thing.

I know that there were some very good men. We had some good ministers who had really done some good work. I'm not talking about them. But for those who had enjoyed wielding the power of

rulership then that's the unfortunate consequence that had so many problems for the membership. It led to widespread abuse from the would-be priests, and that priesthood had been done away with. Let's see what God might think about some of this.

- Do we need a hierarchical government that's top down?
- Do we need a man—any man—between us and God?

You know what Jesus is talking about in Rev. 2 & 3—the message to the Churches. I don't have to go into which era this is, because this is pervasive throughout all the eras, unfortunately:

Revelation 2:6: “But this you have: that you hate the **works of the Nicolaitans**, which I also hate.” Nicolaitans means *conquerors of the people!* How do you conquer somebody? *With a rod of iron! A strong fist! An iron will!* It can also mean *the rulership of a ministry!*

Verse 15: “Moreover, you also have *those* who hold the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate.” Two times God says He *hates* the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which is the *conquering of the people, the rulership over the people*. Is that what God wants? *He does not!*

Now let's see what Jesus thinks. This is during the Passover ceremony, and of all things, when we should be very humble, the unconverted, at that time, disciples who later became the apostles, were arguing. They had an argument. Of course, this when we should be humble, and we should be self-correcting. What was this argument about? *Who should be the greatest? 'Me.' No, me.'* Like little children. Here during this Passover, the disciples were arguing about who should be the greatest.

Luke 22:24: “And there was also an argument among them, *even* this: which of them should be considered *the* greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the nations lord over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors” (vs 24-25). So, the good guys—the ones who are in charge, the rulers of the people—how do they rule? *With authority! They lord it over the people!*

Verse 26: “**But it shall not be this way among you...**” You mean, Jesus doesn't agree with the doctrine of the Nicolaitans either?

“...rather, let the one who is greatest among you be as the younger, and the one who is leading as the one who is serving” (v 26). Jesus set us the example that He is as a servant, and so should we.

For us to be Christ-like, or for us to be Christians, our leaders should follow His example and lead through servitude. Servants should be

ordained, not the ambitious! We see that God's way of government is not an authoritative, man-run, top-down hierarchy. But rather, since God is love, His government is one of love, and that of being a servant.

Yet, the modern Nicolaitans love to turn to two Scriptures. Exo. 18 is where Moses was hearing the people time and time again, from sunup to sundown. His father-in-law says, ‘What is this thing you're doing, you're going to wear yourself out, you'll burn out. You need to setup a government or something to be able to handle all of this demand.’ Why? *Because the people were coming to him:*

- What does God say about this?
- I've got this!
- My friend did this to me!
- His ox gored my ox!
- These two men were striving and one of them fell and hit his head on a rock and died; how do we handle this?

Moses had to sit in the judgment seat that you hear about in Matthew. He would explain what God's rulings were; what God's Law was. We'll find out that this was for the express purpose of the disseminating God's instruction and His judgments, *but not to rule over them!*

Exodus 18:21: “And you shall choose out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness...” That is not characteristic of the ambitious rulers in the Churches of the past.

“...And place them over the people to be leaders of thousands, and leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens. And let them judge *for* the people at all times. And it shall be, every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they shall judge. And make it easier for yourself, and they shall bear *the burden* with you” (vs 21-22).

Their system of government, at that time, was a senior clansman type of government. So, those who had a natural wisdom or a natural leadership ability kind of rose to the top within the clan. They were heard because they had wisdom. They were servants. They would do what needed to be done. Interestingly, all through the Bible there are two sets of governments:

1. the religious
2. the secular or administrative

The religious is typically the prophets and the apostles; whereas the civil government has rulership like the king. Moses had the civil government, he was in charge of everything. Aaron and his sons were in charge of the religious. So, you had two sets.

The priests could die at the hand of the king, so the civil governments were superior; at least in power, not the religious. That's interesting, because today we have the religious who want to exercise both realms of power. Not only to make the decisions spiritually, religiously, but also to run people's lives. Interestingly today, we have a civil government, whether it's for better or for worse, over us, and that's the way that it is.

The other Scripture that the modern Nicolaitans like to turn to is in Eph. 4. Here God outlines the responsibilities for the elders and leaders, telling them that they have three parts in the two-part spear-tip of the 'great commission.' If you remember what the 'great commission' is, it is to feed the flock and to preach the Gospel.

Ephesians 4:11: "And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Wow! It seems like there is quite a bit of heavy government over us. But let's keep reading:

Verse 12: "**For... [this is the purpose for setting these people up] ...the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.**" So there are three functions here.

"...the work of the ministry..." Typically, the work of the ministry is *service*. But the work of the ministry is in expressing the Gospel, it's teaching the Gospel. This is the evangelist that it's talking about in v 11. The evangelistic work does not have to necessarily be an ordained position.

My son Byron, who is not yet baptized, will talk to anybody about God. He'll talk to people on a bus, at the city college, just on the street about God, and will say, 'Hey, would you like to read Scriptures with me?' That's an evangelistic exercise. He's not ordained, not even baptized yet, though he's getting closer and closer.

"...for the edifying of the body of Christ"—this is the pastors and teachers, and the edifying. The word *pastor* comes from an old French word that comes from Latin, and it means *herdsman or shepherd*. That's where we get the root word for pastoral, something from the pasture, the pastoral symphony—Mozart—which is very picturesque.

The pastors or the herdsman watched over, protected and guided the sheep. They probably didn't walk out there with their shepherd's staff, the hook, made out of iron, and they're teaching the sheep to 'walk this way.' It just doesn't make sense. They *guide* the sheep and then they would protect when the walls started come in.

Remember, David was a shepherd. King

David killed a lion and a bear! That was really gutsy. My hat's off to David. That's pretty amazing! But he was a pastor of his sheep. He was shepherding them, guiding them, protecting them, told them where the best water was, where the best food was.

"For the perfecting of the saints..."

Perfecting is like refining.

I make wine, and once the wine is made I go through a 'fining' process, because once the wine is made there are all these little floaties and whatnot in there. It still tastes good, but it's not clear. Once it gets 'fined' if you swirl the wine around it's like there's an extra sparkle in the wine. It's really pretty once it's been 'fined,' but it's already wine.

We're already Christians; we don't have to be ruled over, but *we need to be perfected*. That's what the purpose of the apostles, the prophets, the pastors, the evangelists and the teachers are. It's not to have a top-down government that *rules* over us.

By the way, does Jesus' body—the Body of Christ—need to be coerced, forced, driven and ridden? I guess maybe if His body is wanting to walk different directions. But that's not Jesus' body. The Body of Christ should be unified, and then we go into perfection.

2-Tim. talks about how some of these evil people work. 2-Timothy 3:1: "Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come; for men will be lovers of self..." (vs 1-2).

Verse 4: "Betrayers, reckless, egotistical, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." It seems to me that those who loved rulership, authority and benefits were loving pleasure rather than God.

Verse 5: "Having an outward appearance of Godliness, but denying the power of *true* Godliness. But *as for you*, turn away from *all* these." It's not just talking about those, but all these other characteristic sinners.

You and I need to *avoid the doctrines of the Nicolaitans!* We need to not offer our respect and submission to those who would have rulership over us. They often say that 'you need to think the way I think; you need to believe the way I believe.' But this is spiritual self-righteousness. *It's ungodliness!*

Philippians 2:3: "*Let nothing be done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself.*" The *English Standard Version* has it: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility."

I know this is kind of heavy and it seems like I'm just really all over these guys. But I've seen a lot of abuse and I've seen a lot of devastation that

the ministry have caused, although I've seen a lot of good, as well. So, I don't want to leave that undone. I'm not just tearing them up, but these are lessons that we can learn, and I'm showing why we should not embrace the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, why we should not submit to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, and why we should want God's government ruling in our lives, rather an imposed created, fabricated, top-down hierarchal thing.

It's interesting that in the Church at Home messages, he talks about the 'nones'—not the nuns that the Catholic Church has—like I don't want any of that, none of that. That's the fastest growing 'religious' faction. They don't want any formalized government or 'religion' over them, because they're tired of the lies, the hypocrisy, the shenanigans, the sanctimoniousness, the posing and abuse from the hierarchy of men telling them what to do. And especially if it's unscriptural or the ministers are unconverted.

We need to be leery and weary of those who wish to foist themselves to lead, to teach and rule over us. A lot of people want that. Be careful of the ambitious would-be teachers who want to lord it over us, who are the modern Nicolaitans.

On the other hand, make no mistake, true church leaders do have authority. They do need to carry authority. Jesus said that for the shepherds to be good shepherds they need to be under the Good Shepherd Himself. They are to shepherd the flock. They are:

- to coach
- to encourage
- to guide
- to teach
- to direct
- to help

us, the membership, in our problems and situations and also to teach. But they also carry the authority to protect the flock, as David did to protect his flock. There are many interlopers, there are many who would love to come in and infiltrate our ranks and take away from us what we have. Jesus says, '**Let no man take your crown.**'

So, they are to protect the flock from the false ministers. God outlines their responsibilities and punishment (Ezek. 33-34, Jer. 23, Luke 12). How do we *know* these guys who are in charge, and what they are doing?

Isaiah 8:20: "**To the Law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.**" They have to speak according to the Law and the testimony. *We shall know them by their fruits* (Matt. 7). Their fruits generate all kinds of evidence to us

whether they are serving God and the membership, or if they're not. *The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*; He serves them (John 10).

One of the problems of Herbert Armstrong's caste system was that they used to use ordination to promote individuals who fit their mold. They had an expectation of what a minister should be, and what a minister should look like. They thought of his abilities, how he looked, his presentation, or even his hair style as a criteria for ordination, rather than his commitment to service, his commitment to the brethren, having the heart of a servant, which is what Jesus told us.

For those jockeying for position, those ambitious individuals looking to be in front of the people, wanting notoriety, the respect and benefits, those ambitious teachers who want to lead and teach—were promoted—rather than the ones who had hearts of a servant in general. They, instead, had the heart of a *master*; 'I will be your master.'

So, we've seen that those who should and should not have responsibility physically in the Church. The servant should be those who are ordained, like Jesus said, 'I am here as a Servant' (Luke 12)—not the ambitious. We seen that men should not rule over you. So, let's tie a bow on this little thing.

- Who *should* rule over us?
- Who *should* rule in our heart?

We should have Godly character and be able to rule over the sin in our lives. We have our unrighteous desires. We should have Godly character to help us to rule over that. And we have the Holy Spirit to help us bring 'every thought into captivity.'

1-Timothy 2:5: "For there *is* one God, and one Mediator between God and men—the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself *as* a ransom for all..." (vs 5-6).

We only need *one man* in between us and God the Father, and that man is our High Priest and Savior Jesus Christ. Heb. 3-5 tells us Who that High Priest is, and that it's Jesus Christ after the order of Melchisedec.

Colossians 3:15: "And **let the peace of God rule in your hearts...** [His love, mercy, kindness] (v 16): ...**Let the Word of Christ** dwell in you richly..."—the Holy Bible!

Who should rule in us? *Jesus should rule in our heart!* He's the only Mediator; He's the only One in between us and God!

I believe that there was a reason for all the church wars, and one of the reasons was that we

were to be developing a personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ both. We can talk to both of Them. Stephen did, Stephen talked Jesus directly. But our elder Brother and God the Father, we should have a relationship with both of Them. How do we mediate except we go through Jesus.

- John 10
- Hebrews 3-5

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This is how we know Them, and how They can know us. We don't need any man to come between us and God, except Jesus Christ. We can show love, honor and respect to those who have responsibility over us, to help us. Those who are helping us and guiding us, those who are shepherding us, those who are giving us their pastoralship.

I appreciate the loving kindness—and this is not a kiss-up... I never made into the ministry because I was not one that fit their bill. I would not kiss-up and just humble myself in that way, so I didn't fit the mold. I didn't fit their idea or expectations, and unfortunately, my mouth has gotten me into many more problems than I would care to disclose. But if I say something, it generally sincere and from the heart, whether good or bad. I try to be straightforward and a straight shooter.

We have really enjoyed and appreciated the loving leadership that Fred has expressed to us. I say that definitely not as a kiss-up, but rather as a true appreciation that God has given us a very valid leadership, a humble leadership of servitude.

We know that we are to be being perfected. We are the saints and we are being perfected. We have no need of rulership from the top down by men. Again, God's way is *a way of service*. Our service may be in the future. We may be called upon to sacrifice in a way that we don't care to. We may have to give our lives just as Christ gave His life for the Church. But ***that would be being and having the heart of a servant!***

Scriptural References:

- 1) Revelation 2:6, 15
- 2) Luke 22:24-26
- 3) Exodus 18:21-22
- 4) Ephesians 4:11-12
- 5) 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4-5
- 6) Philippians 2:3
- 7) Isaiah 8:20
- 8) 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- 9) Colossians 3:15-16

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Ephesians 33-34
- Jeremiah 23
- Luke 12
- Matthew 7