



"Fifteen million laws have been passed to try to enforce the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments."

—Anonymous

**21-Nov-03**

## **Expanding Government**

"Government, government everywhere" fairly summarizes last week's essay, and we could add, "not an innocent in sight." Government—whether at the local, state, national, or international level—has bound us with so many laws, statutes, regulations, and picayune rules that we are at any given moment guilty of breaking a handful of them and liable to be penalized, fined, or hauled off to the slammer.

This nation started off well. The Declaration of Independence, in setting down our foundational principles, was written on one rather large page. Our Constitution with its Bill of Rights, following the principled brevity of its predecessor, can be printed in a small pamphlet. Yet, since then, American government has so expanded that it requires whole libraries to contain the verbiage of the executive, legislative, and judicial contributions to our body of law. If we accept Shakespeare's dictum that "brevity is the soul of wit," it is no great stretch to say that we have lost our wits!

Each time a major law is passed in Congress, state legislatures, and city councils, thousands of words and reams of paper are added to our law books. For instance, the latest Medicare bills, which concentrate on prescription

drug benefits, run to 747 (House) and 1,043 pages (Senate). This proposed law, granting another huge entitlement to Americans, is only one small point in the overall Medicare system! Every possible situation must be regulated, every loophole considered and closed, and every special interest must be answered. Not even lawmakers read and understand these laws!

And we can expect no end of lawmaking. In every legislative body, hundreds of new laws and regulations are put forward each session to cover every eventuality from diapering carriage horses to amending the Constitution. We are spared a high percentage of these proposals, as many are simply rejected or tabled by the legislative leadership. If this did not happen, the public would be deluged under a tidal wave of inane and unnecessary ordinances beyond what it has to deal with already!

For instance, in Georgia in 2002, a state senator proposed requiring school boards to ensure that school restrooms contained sufficient toilet paper. Another bill prohibited anyone under the age of 65 from hunting marsh hens from a boat powered by an electric motor. Yet another wished to ban grocery store baggers from licking their fingers. Georgia lawmakers seriously considered all these proposed laws!

Why do we feel the need to regulate and codify every possible human behavior? Why do laws have to cover every eventuality? Why are we not content with enforcing the laws we already have on the books?

There are several possible answers to these questions, but each of them comes down to human nature. [Romans 8:7](#) provides a principle regarding God's law that is applicable to all law: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against [God](#); for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be." We know, almost instinctively, that our nature does not want to obey laws of any kind, but contrarily, we know that human society can function successfully only when it is well-regulated. Thus, rather than trust people to live according to principle, human governments use law to restrict its people to certain acceptable behaviors, enforcing it with the punishing power of the state (see [Romans 13:3-5](#)). Because of its innate defiance of law, the populace, on the other hand, seeks out and exploits every gap in the law, which the government must then shore up. The cycle continues unabated until tyranny, rebellion, or both occur.

[Isaiah 55:8-9](#) informs us that God thinks and acts on a transcendently higher level than man does, and this is true of His approach to law as well. He really has only one law, the law of [love](#) ([Romans 13:10](#)). Love defines what God is and how He lives ([I John 4:8](#), 16). [Jesus](#) split this basic law into two divisions, love toward God and love toward men ([Matthew 22:37-40](#)). For Israel—and for us too—God codifies His law of love into Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), arranged so that the first four cover our love toward God and the last six, our love toward our neighbors.

That is it! The rest of the Bible expounds on this one basic principle of love, teaching us how to apply it in various situations. If we ever have a question about a certain activity, all we have to do is ask ourselves, "Does it show godly love toward God? Self? Neighbor?" and if it fails this test, we should not do it. God's way is simple, elegant, efficient, and eternally applicable, unlike man's ever-expanding, nitpicking incursion into public and private conduct. In addition, a person who consistently lives by God's law does not need a threatening, external power to force him into compliance; His obedience is internally generated.

What a superior system! This is another good reason we should be [praying always](#), "Your Kingdom come!" ([Matthew 6:10](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Self-Government and Responsibility \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The operation of God's government absolutely depends on each person governing himself, never going beyond the boundaries God has given him. Human nature always wants to break free of those boundaries. Through our entire lives, we need to study diligently to find out what our responsibilities are to God and fellow man, developing godly character. Godly character and human nature will be perpetually at war with one another as long as we are

in the flesh. All the experiences we go through are preparing us to be a better judge or king. While we are being judged, though we may exercise righteous judgment, we dare not pass judgment nor justify sin in ourselves. Spiritual maturity comes when we accept responsibility for what we are and have done.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Fruit of the Spirit: Love](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The apostle Paul lists love as the first of the fruits of the Spirit. Most people do not know what biblical love is, believing that it is caring for others, but that idea is insufficient. In his first epistle, the apostle John writes that love is the primary trait of God that exemplifies His character of outgoing concern that produces goodness. John Ritenbaugh explains what godly love is and what it does.

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