



"It was our own moral failure and not any accident of chance, that while preserving the appearance of the Republic we lost its reality."  
—Cicero

**03-Oct-08**

## **Many Princes**

Wise Solomon was inspired to write, "Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes. . ." ([Proverbs 28:2](#)). In other words, if a people begin turning from righteousness, a natural consequence is greater human oversight—government—in one form or another.

The history of the United States proves this principle: The nation started with ideals of limited central government, but federalism leaped forward following the Civil War. Liberalism flourished during the Roaring '20s, followed by increases in governmental size and power during the Great Depression and World War II. During the '60s and '70s, the mores of the nation continued to slide and a rebellious generation arose, followed a short time later by continued growth in the bureaucracy. Today, as licentiousness and selfishness explode, the government continues to assume more authority and control.

This cause-and-effect is clear in hindsight—for those willing to see it—but rarely anticipated ahead of time. However, one of the most insightful American Founders, John Adams, had this principle in mind when he wrote, "Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly

inadequate to the government of any other." Likewise, William Penn noted, "If we will not be governed by [God](#), then we must be governed by tyrants." Yet, the nation ceased being a moral people. It ceased recognizing God. It should come as no surprise, then, that the Constitution, which allowed for a tremendous amount of liberty and granted few powers to the government, is now essentially a relic.

The principle in [Proverbs 28:2](#) applies to any group of people, and the church is no exception. Those familiar with the history of the [Worldwide Church of God](#) (WCG) know that Herbert Armstrong's ideas regarding church government were different during the 1930s from what was actively practiced in the later years of the church. What happened in the intervening time?

One facet that is readily apparent during that time is numeric growth—and lots of it. From the humblest of beginnings in 1934 to a membership of around 150,000 at the time of Herbert Armstrong's death in 1986, the organization had phenomenal growth, especially considering that its doctrines were so far out of the mainstream. However, what happened after Herbert Armstrong's death perhaps reveals why there is so much anecdotal evidence of "many princes"—of heavy-handedness and overbearing authority.

Of that roughly 150,000 people, perhaps only 20% are still fellowshipping with church groups that hold to the same basic doctrines. That is, it appears that around 80% of the membership and ministry in the WCG did not truly believe the doctrines that they nominally agreed with. If this is correct, it would mean that those who had *the faith* were far outnumbered by those who did not.

It should not be shocking, then, that policies were adopted and applied, often by carnal men, to a largely carnal, corporate organization—policies and approaches that would have been unnecessary if the majority of the people lived *the faith*. The members and ministers may not have been "transgressing" to the same degree as the surrounding culture, but the presence of "many princes" to maintain order and control indicates many of the people were not governing themselves. God's subsequent scattering of the church confirms this.

Heavy-handed leadership indicates that—rightly or wrongly—the governor is mistrustful of the governed. Sometimes that mistrust is unwarranted, as when the governor is more concerned about his position and power than about serving those entrusted to his care. At other times that mistrust *is* warranted, as when the governed continually produce the [works of the flesh: sexual immorality](#), impurity, debauchery, idolatry, [witchcraft](#), hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, etc. ([Galatians 5:19-21](#), NIV). Like Paul dealing with the Corinthians, in such cases the governed typically need to be dealt with carnally rather than spiritually ([I Corinthians 3:1](#)).

However, the ideal outlined in various other passages is not so. [Jesus](#) contrasts the behavior of the Gentiles—those who do not know God—in lording over their subjects with great authority with His own: servant leadership ([Matthew 20:25-27](#); [Mark 10:42-45](#); [Luke 22:24-27](#)). Paul exhorts the elders at Ephesus, the overseers, "to *shepherd* the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" ([Acts 20:28](#)), not to browbeat or oppress. In [II Corinthians 1:24](#), he states that the ministry does not "have dominion over your faith, but are *fellow workers* for your [joy](#); for by faith you stand." A few chapters later, he writes that there were limits to the "sphere" to which God appointed them ([II Corinthians 10:13-14](#)). [Hebrews 13:17](#) counsels us, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those *who must give account*"—to God! Peter, too, exhorts the elders to shepherd God's flock willingly and eagerly, setting a proper, Christian example for the people ([I Peter 5:1-4](#)).

[Ephesians 4:11](#) explains that it is God who gives the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and He gives them for the edification of the church. This does not preclude false prophets and ministers, of which many of the epistles warn, nor does it mean that these human servants are infallible. But it does mean that God works through His servants, and the servants do what is in their authority to help the Body spiritually. The individual, in turn, learns from those whom God has gifted to teach, and he *governs himself* so heavy-handedness or rigid control becomes unnecessary. When one sees "many princes" arise, it is a sure indicator that transgressions are increasing.

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Spotting False Teachers](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

People who jump from one fellowship to another often do so for superficial reasons such as a personal slight or perhaps defending a pet doctrine. Ministers should be judged by the fruit that they produce in terms of their teaching or the examples that they set. Because fruit takes time to mature, we members ought to exercise patience, refraining from grumbling, or premature judging. In the checklist distinguishing the true shepherds from the hirelings, true shepherds are seen in their genuine concern for the flock, as opposed to hirelings who only devour or take advantage of the flock.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [God's Power: Our Shield Against Apostasy](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

As Christians, we realize that God is not only powerful, but He is also the source of *all* power. How do we translate this understanding into practical action? John Ritenbaugh explains how we can tap into God's power to avoid slipping into apostasy.

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## CGG Weekly: Many Princes (03-Oct-08)

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