



"I am rather tired of hearing about our rights. ... The time is come ... to hear about responsibilities."

—Peter Marshall

09-Jan-09

The Nanny Church (Part One)

The term "Nanny State" has come to describe a government that insists on over-regulating the individual in order to force him to act according to the government's wishes, rather than allowing the individual to make his own choices. Such a government is essentially trying to create a self-defined utopia via legislation. Men believe the answer is more laws, better enforcement, or a more comprehensive government plan. However, the true answer is to change the heart. Since human governments cannot do that, they must resort to controlling their citizens' behaviors.

On the other side of this coin, we have the expectations and responses of those being governed. As they see a nation spiraling out of control, they begin demanding that the leadership "do something." So they elect leaders who promise "change," who promise to fix this or that financial or social problem through legislation, and bit by bit everybody's freedoms are curtailed. Political leaders soon become the arbiters of how every citizen should live. It all starts with the people demanding that the leaders "do something."

Along with this are those who believe the government exists to take care of them. Many people want—even demand—government programs, benefits, and all manner of largesse to protect them from the vagaries of life. They begin believing that it is the government's job to give them healthcare, childcare, retirement, and education; to fund obscene art exhibits; and to stop hurricanes. They want a Nanny State, *so it will take care of them*. Thus, the government begins policies of redistribution—also known as "communism," or "socialism" in its soft form—where it takes what is produced and doles it out according to what *it* judges to be "fair." Even though communism was clearly a failed experiment, many people still favor a form of it because it means that they do not have to be responsible—that someone else will take care of them.

Wherever governments of men are in place, pressures will mount for the responsibilities of the governor to expand and the responsibilities of the governed to contract. The church is not immune to this pressure to create a "Nanny Church." It includes both the actions of some church leaders in being dictatorial, as well as some members' ideas of what they think the church should be doing for them.

To understand what is at stake, we must remember that [God](#) is creating man in His character image ([Genesis 1:26](#)). For this purpose to be accomplished, mankind had to be given choice. We choose eternal life one day at a time, one decision at a time. If we are not already practiced in living God's way, choosing eternal life on a daily basis, we will be unprepared for the Kingdom. God is developing character in us that is tested, proved and re-proved by means of the decisions that we make.

God does not want anybody in His Kingdom who is only good at following orders. He wants sons and daughters who have taken on His values and character and made them their own, so that they will always choose the right way of their own volition. His purpose requires that we be able to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing ([Deuteronomy 30:19](#)). If our every word and deed are regimented—whether by God or by a human government—then we do not develop character. Thus, God is working with us to help us make right choices *without* having to be controlled externally.

The carnal mind, though, really only understands external control. We can see this in Jesus Christ's teaching in [Luke 22:24-26](#):

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."

He uses the Gentiles here to exemplify those who do not know God, and they govern by "exercising lordship" and "exercising authority." Matthew's account says that they "lord it over" the people.

Then Jesus declares that those who exercise authority in this way are called "benefactors." The basic meaning of the Greek word is a "worker of good." Lording authority over people could be considered "good" only in the sense that it enforces order and discipline rather than chaos. Yet, the *means* by which that order and discipline is brought about is the real issue. If it is done in the way of the Gentiles, it is achieved through force, coercion, oppressive legislation, threats, and fear. However, if God's way is followed, order and discipline may take longer to accomplish, but it will endure because it comes from *within* the people rather than being *imposed on* them.

Another way that "benefactor" can be understood is "one who provides for another." In collectivist political systems, the government is seen as the benefactor of the people because it "guarantees" things like jobs, food, healthcare, retirement, security, and so on, in return for allegiance. The Gentiles rule by causing the people to depend on them for everything, and they appear to be generous and benevolent by "giving" things back to the people.

In either application, though, Christ says, "but *not so among you*." Recall that His teaching began when the disciples argued over who was the greatest. They were focused on their *position* and their *status*—like those who do not know God—and Jesus had to direct them back to their *responsibility*. His instruction to those who would have authority in His church was to *serve*, not to *rule*.

The service of the church is geared toward helping the members toward "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" ([Ephesians 4:13](#)). He clearly does not mean "serving" by establishing iron-fisted control and ruling the members by fear, nor does He mean "benevolently" doing for them what they can and should do for themselves. Both of those extremes stunt character development, leaving the people unprepared to live eternally. Instead, He means serving by applying those gifts that have been given for the edification of the body (verse 16), and not taking more authority than He has given.

Next time, we will consider the solution to Nannyism, and how God intends spiritual growth to occur.

- David C. Grabbe

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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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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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