

Self-Government And Responsibility (Part One)

Self-Government in the Church

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We cannot properly understand this topic unless we go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible and see it in its proper setting.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

I believe that this is God's specific purpose statement for the entire creation. That is, that everything that God did is focused in on this statement that He has made man in His image and I believe that it is from this point where we have the words "image" (which actually appears three different times there in those two verses), "likeness," and "dominion."

It is from this point, with this goal in mind, that the events that are recorded in the Bible—who was involved in them, why they happened, or why what did not happen—is reported. Though the term, "God is reproducing himself" never appears in the Bible, it becomes clear later on that indeed is what He is doing—God is reproducing after His kind, producing a family just like Him.

Now we have these terms "image" and "likeness." In common everyday speech, we use terms like, "Why, he is just in the spitting image of his father his mother." "He looks just like his father or mother." These are common everyday terms. We may not use them everyday, but they are a part of our language and by them we mean that somebody is so much like another member of the family, that it is easily seen where the traits have come from.

Later on in the Bible, we see terms like brother, sister, father, mother, wife, sons, daughters, adoption, and family, but what is the image of God?

Because we are physical, our first reaction is to always think or to look for something physical, meaning a form or a shape that will give us some idea, some concept, of what it is we are being made into, but there is none because that is not God's specific purpose.

If God gave us a form or a shape (for Himself) that is what we would concentrate on and we would be led away from the goal that He set. This is why such things as fashions or cosmetics are so important to us. We see what we consider to be beautiful, an ideal, and so we endeavor then to conform to it. But these are things that are vain, even deceitful, to those things that have to do with God's purpose; they are purposeless as far as God's ordering of things.

II Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, [meaning Christians] with unveiled face, [that is, the mystery has been removed; we are able to perceive, to understand what God is doing, we have been converted, we have the Spirit of God], with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

There is God's purpose in much clearer language. We are being transformed from the image of man to the image of Jesus Christ. What sort of an image do we have of Him? We do not know what He looked like; we have no form or shape. Instead what God gave us was the image of a life lived. So we are being transformed into the image of that life that was lived and the means for accomplishing this is the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, or we might say as Peter said, "by the imparting of the divine nature."

In God's wisdom, in order for His purpose to be accomplished, it was necessary for man to be given free moral agency. This is another term that nowhere appears in the Bible, yet that mankind is a free moral agent is obvious right from the very beginning of the Bible because man is given choices as to which way he will choose to go. Nothing else in creation, except angels, is free to make choices involving morals. Everything else operates according to the way it was designed. It is impossible for an animal to sin, because an animal cannot go out beyond, making a choice to do

something that would be in disagreement with the laws according to which he was designed.

"Free," according to *Webster's*, is defined in this way: "Not subject to control or domination of another." "'Free' stresses the complete absence of external rule and the full right to make one's own decisions."

We began in Genesis 1. Think about Adam and Eve being put in the Garden, and then what happened? God undoubtedly taught them the difference between the choices available to them. He commanded them not to take of one particular tree, but they were *free* to take of it regardless of the instructions and commands. He did not try to control them, except through the instruction and the commands that He gave.

God forced the issue, only in that He gave them choices. But He did not in any way control their choice; they were free. The choice of which way they would go was entirely left to them.

God did not show up in the Garden until after they sinned. God did not show up until after Cain killed Abel. Did you ever notice that is always the way it is? God does not stop you from sinning; He does not stop you from breaking laws, because for Him to do that would interfere with His purpose. We need free moral agency in order to become like Him, to be in His image.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. [Notice the pattern here, it undoubtedly follows exactly the same pattern that He had established with Adam and Eve: teaching is given, commands are made] But if your heart turns away [It is obvious that He is not going to stop the Israelites. If He was going to control their actions, that would have been impossible. They were free to make the choices], so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and

possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

It has ever been this way because it is a necessary step in God's purpose if we are going to be in His image, because the image He is conforming us to is a nature, it is a character image, it is an attitude image, it is not one of mere form and shape. It is only through having the opportunity to freely give ourselves to a way of life, to the way that He lives, that we will be in His image. Nobody is as free as God, and if we are ever going to be free, it is because we consciously choose to submit to and to obey His truth.

Next, I feel that it is necessary to understand more about this issue of control. I think it is very evident that God exerts very little control in our lives. The Protestant churches have a doctrine about one being "God-controlled," they call it, or "spirit-controlled." But those terms are misleading because they give the impression that God, or the spirit, is exercising power to control our lives.

Now God is governing, He is managing His creation. He is exercising power to move the events of history toward the goal that He has in mind, but He is exercising very little power to control individual decisions in individual lives.

If God was exercising control over people, I can guarantee there would be no wars, there would be no famine, but neither would we be anything much more than an animal either. We have to be free to break the rules; we have to be free to consciously give ourselves, once we know the truth, in obedience to that way.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Instead of God controlling, we see God approach the issue of government from an all together different point. He says that humanity is not subject to

Him. He specifically uses the term "the carnal mind" is not subject to him. That is a great deal different from being controlled.

The word translated "subject" here, is a form of the word *hupotasso*. It is a military term and it means "to arrange in order under." It is something that one would ordinarily do to something else.

For example, a drill instructor in the army will arrange, in order, the recruits under him and he will use whatever force is necessary to whip them into line. He will use whatever powers at his command to make them subject to the military and he will threaten, he will cajole, he will make them do extra duty, he will punish, he will treat them nicely, he will do anything, in order to arrange them under, make them subject to the military establishment.

But, arranging oneself under, that is, making one subject to, is something one can do for himself. Let me show you a series of verses where forms of this word *hupotasso* are used. The only difference being, the word might be in a different tense, because of the context. I am using these verses to show you that a person has to make himself subject to.

Ephesians 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting [*hupotasso*] to one another in the fear of God.

There it is very clear *hupotasso* is something that one has to do to himself, arrange himself in order under, in this case in order under one another. I could have incidentally gone to the very next verse in Ephesians 5, but I want to pick something up here in Colossians.

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit [*hupotasso*] to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Submission by a wife to a husband is an act of making herself subject to. She is arranging herself under his authority, not because he is superior to her by creation, but because God requires it for the sake of order.

I Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be [*hupotasso*] submissive, as the law also says.

The King James Version says instead of submissive, that "they are under obedience," but again you see it is something given, not something externally controlled by God. The woman, because she has faith in God, subjects herself to the command and the authority of God.

That is what we are dealing with here in Romans 8. The carnal mind will not submit to God, so the concept is that when man is in the flesh—that is, physically oriented, unconverted, and carnal—he cannot subject himself to God. That is what the verse says—he *cannot* do it. He cannot make the choice. He cannot control himself to make himself subject to God. Is that not what it says? "Neither indeed can be"—so he is not really free, is he?

Now the flip side to this is, and the inference, the implication, beginning about Romans 6 and going all the way through Romans 8, is that when God converts a person, gives them a new spirit, a new nature, he then is able to do it, but he still must make the choices without being controlled externally.

Matthew 20:25-26 But Jesus called them to Himself and said [this is the disciples, because they had gotten into an argument], "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles [notice this terminology] lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

Obviously Jesus intends something different for His church. Something different for the family of God, something different from the way mankind normally exercises rule. So mankind's approach is different from God's. It is based on the external applying of force to produce submission, fear of the law, fear of the police, and fear of the penalty.

It is interesting that in Luke's account of this same episode that Jesus said that these Gentile rulers, who exercise lordship and authority, are called

benefactors. I do not know why, but my guess is because they probably bring a measure of order out of what could be a very chaotic situation. I mean absolute anarchy, because remember the carnal mind will not subject itself to the law of God and it is the law of God that is the model for all of the laws of mankind.

So unless one has the Spirit of God, they cannot exercise the right kind of internal controls to submit themselves to the government of God. Without that Spirit being there, then mankind is going to run amock and so a strong man comes along and he applies external pressure, whips the people into line, and therefore brings about at least a modicum of order and people say, "Great, we now have peace."

That is what they did with Adolph Hitler. He brought order out of chaos in Germany and then he proceeded to run them right into their death, but they had order for a while and you hear people say, "Hitler was a good man because..." and then they give the reasons and frequently it is because he established order in the country.

So I can understand why they would be called benefactors, but with God's family, that should not have to occur. People should not have to be whipped into line and made externally to obey the law, the government of God, because Jesus clearly says here, "it shall not be so among you."

God's government does not operate that way. You can see that from the very beginning. God did not intervene; he did not apply external pressure on Adam and Eve or Cain and Abel. God allowed, in Israel, things to get to the place where everybody did that which was right in his own eyes.

Obviously God expects His people to control themselves, does He not? They have to be self-governed, do they not? Yes they do. Remember Adam and Eve again, back to the Garden of Eden, we had a third person, a third being, Satan, who interposed himself between Adam and Eve and God. and he convinced Adam and Eve that they should take control and they did.

They, in effect, said, "I will decide for myself what I will do and what my destiny will be." That is what the carnal mind has desired ever since, to control itself **and others with it**. That second half of that sentence is very

important. It desires not only to control itself according to its ideas, but also to make others conform to what it believes is correct.

There are three major reasons why this is so. These principles apply to virtually every choice and are involved in every conflict. Three reasons why the carnal mind decides, or wants, to do this:

The first one is **pride**. We think we know better. Adam and Eve were convinced by Satan that they knew better, and even though they had been instructed, they chose on their own recognizance to do what they felt was right. Not only what they felt was right, but let us expand this out to how a thing should be done, why a thing should be done, when, where, or by whom it should be done. The cure for this is humility, but humility too is a choice, as James 5 and I Peter 5 both show very clearly. A person chooses to humble himself before God, before the truth of God.

The second drive that is motivating the carnal mind is **fear**. We want to control because we fear things will not work out in our best interest and we will suffer, at the very least, inconvenience or pain. So we try to seize control of the situation so that we will not be inconvenienced or that we will not suffer pain. In order to ensure that these things that we fear will not happen, our deceitful heart motivates us to a whole variety of responses. Some people get belligerent and they threaten harm or pain and they bully their way, overpowering the opposition through intimidation. Others go out and they gather friends to agree with them and force their way on others through sheer numbers.

Others manipulate by argument, by not letting the issue go and they talk, and they talk, and they talk, and they talk until the other person gives up in exasperation, just to get rid of the subject. You see, in reality the manipulator is working to control and so they fear that things will not go their way. Other people bribe their way through gifts, or promises of sexual favors. Other people pout and they manipulate by trying to make you feel guilty because you made them feel so bad.

Others say, "Well this is the way it is going to be, and if you do not like it, you can lump it." So they arbitrarily decide because they feel threatened with the loss of control, they feel that somebody else might come up with a better idea, a better way, and maybe make them look dumb.

They feel the loss of esteem, the loss of self-respect. Human nature wants to control. The solution to every one of these last six or seven things that all fall under the topic of fear, is living faith in the Creator God.

The third reason that is driving or motivating human nature is **covetousness**. We decide we want something and we will do whatever we feel necessary to get it. So we have here **pride, fear, and covetousness** and all of them are bent in the direction of gaining control for the self. These things, of course, reflect on our relationship with God and this is why human nature will not be subject to God. We will not give ourselves over to control of our faith in God, for example.

The government of the church we have all just come out of has been essentially one of authoritative control of others. I do not know how it came to be that way, but a major part of the governance of that church is based on the idea that the ministry is the government of God. It is not a question of whether the ministry has authority; of course it has authority, that is very clearly seen in the Bible, that the ministry has authority. But is the ministry the government of God? There is a big difference possibly between the two.

Let us go back to Isaiah 9. Do you know that the word "government" only appears four times in the Bible? That is rather astounding. Two of them are in these two verses. Three of the occasions directly refer to Christ.

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, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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.

The government of the Kingdom of which this prophecy is about is on His shoulders. Is He not talking here about the Kingdom of God? The government is on His shoulders. That is where the responsibility lies and that is where the authority is. The word "governments" also appears a number of times and interestingly enough, one of the times it appears is in I Corinthians 12 where the apostle Paul describes the gifts given to all of the parts of the body, not just the ministry, but all of the parts of the body. He gave some apostles, prophets, etc and eventually he gets to the word, "governments." If you have a fairly modern translation of the Bible, you may not even find that word, because in modern translations it is translated, "administrators" and we might even say, "bureaucrats."

Let us continue to pursue this subject of what is the government of God.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul [every life] be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

All authority is from God. In other words, all authority on earth has been given. Those benefactors that Christ spoke of in the book of Luke (we did not turn to it) were given their authority by God and then they proceed to take more than was originally given through whatever method they employ to control toward accomplishing their end.

What Romans 13:1 is telling you is that the governments of the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, Russia, Iraq, Iran, Somalia—all of them receive their authority from the God we worship. Now, do we consider them the government of God? You are going to have to answer that question.

They got their authority directly from God, the same way that we suppose that the authority of the ministry came directly from God. Yes they both did! Both the authority of the State and the authority of the ministry came from exactly the same source, but we do not consider the civil governments to be the government of God. Why do we assume that the government in the church is the government of God?

We assume it because of the religious connection but is that a false assumption? We shall see. In verse 7, the instruction there includes the government in the church. "Render therefore to all their due." There is respect due in the church to the ministry. There is respect in the church due to deacons. Indeed, brethren, there is respect due to everybody in the church. "Render therefore to all their due"—everybody.

The subject here happens to be governmental. So, the taxes, the custom, the fear, and the honor are all something that the governed give to those who are in authority. God nowhere instructs those in authority to control people to the extent of taking these things from them the way the great benefactors do.

I do not know, as I said earlier, how the Worldwide Church of God came to be that way. But we have come out from an essentially controlling institution, and that attitude spread from church administration to the ministry (and I was part and parcel to that); on to the congregation, through sermons, sermons on government, sermons on marriage, sermons on childrearing, sermons on things like business practices.

Let me give you an exaggerated example. Back in the 60s and on into the 70s, the solution in child rearing was "hit him." That was the solution to everything. I said that I am exaggerating somewhat here, but any of you who experienced it know that it was not far from the truth. Whenever the kids heard a childrearing sermon, they knew that the "hand of God," in the person of their parents was going to be tanning their hide a great deal more frequently than before the sermon.

There was a paternalistic, militaristic, and controlling attitude underlying every relationship. I think that *Webster's* definition of "paternalistic" is especially interesting. It is a system under which an authority undertakes to

supply needs to regulate conduct of those under its control in matters affecting them as individuals, as well as their relations to authority and each other.

The Vatican is actually a political state; the Pope is the "Vicar of Christ," that is, he rules in place of Christ. Cardinals are actually political figures carrying political titles in religious trapping and garb. We can clearly see this because they really took it to an extreme—to such an extreme they actually controlled the civil governments through their ecclesiastical powers.

Most of you are familiar enough with the Inquisition to know that it is fairly well established that the Catholic Church, through its ecclesiastical powers affecting the civil authorities, brought about the death of approximately 50 million people in the Inquisition. We did not get caught up, thankfully, that far, because they really took it to an extreme.

In an article published in *The Good News*, July 1952 by Dr. Herman L. Hoeh. He is quoting here from somebody else:

The papacy is the Roman empire again extended over Europe by a universal code and a provincial government, by a hierarchy of religious praetors and a host of inferior officers, each in strict subordination to those immediately above them and gradually descending to the very lowest rank of society, the whole with a certain degree of freedom of action, but a restrained and limited freedom and with an appeal to the spiritual Caesar [the Pope] in the last resort.

That was a quote from the *History of Latin Christianity* by Newman, page 28.

Now, Dr. Hoeh, making a comment, says:

The papacy according to these historians, is a model, a counterpart, an image of the Beast, which is the Roman government. This ecclesiastical government compelled people to worship a man-ruled church, organized into a worldly government, although [now

listen to this] palmed off as the government of God. It is in reality an image of a human civil government and worshipping any image is idolatry.

A third quote from the same paper:

The church of God is constituted by those saints, who are begotten and led by the Holy Spirit. It is not a kingdom, for Christ's kingdom is not of this present age [John 18:36].

Remember that quote. It is going to be very important in just a little bit.

A fourth quote:

Every office of service in the church [this is again Dr. Hoeh] for spreading the gospel was and ought to be according to the gifts of God proven by the fruits. Jesus has always been the absolute Head of the church, not any board, man, or vicar ruling in the place of Christ.

Dr. Hoeh is not saying there is no government in the church; he is saying Christ is the absolute head. The government is on His shoulders.

Edward Gibbon [again Dr. Hoeh is talking here but quoting Edward Gibbon] rightly says that the apostles declined the office of legislation.

That is from the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 15. Again, Dr. Hoeh:

The laws governing the lives of true Christians are not human canons or traditions sanctioned by boards, or church councils, but the inviolate laws of God revealed in the Scriptures.

A fifth quote, again Dr. Hoeh,

The Bible nowhere teaches that man rules in the place of Christ. Christ has no one ruling in His place, every minister in the church

is ruled by Christ and carries out Christ's will, not his own or the peoples', but those early bishops deceived the gullible [Christians] into believing that they stood in the place of Christ and that the episcopal form of church government was a holy institution, which the people should hold in reverence. The congregations voted [this is taking it a little bit further than ever happened with us] those beguiling leaders into office, since they taught what the people desired to hear in order to gain authority and prestige over them. This is how the worship of the image, the idolizing of the church government developed.

Two more quotes, Dr. Hoeh:

It was the people who permitted the ministers and bishops to deceive them into modeling church government after the civil government.

By now the mutual alliance of the bishops enabled them to attack the original rights of the people in having their say so, the participation of the people gradually ceased amid the superstitious reverence for the divine authority of the assemblies of the bishops. The bishops owed no allegiance to any higher human authority than there own assemblies in which they voted on matters of faith.

I said to you earlier to remember that thing about the Kingdom of God. Here is a quote from *The Worldwide News*, Monday, June 24, 1985, Mr. Armstrong's article on the recent history of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God, last page in his concluding statements:

Meanwhile we pray also that God will keep those of us who remain loyal, constantly steadfast, growing in grace and spiritual character and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Overcoming self, the world and Satan and enduring to the end, pray that you, the loyal members of God's church, remain dedicated to the Kingdom of God, which is the government of God.

The Kingdom of God is the government of God. Now you give yourself the old hatpin test and while you are doing that, I, a minister, will give myself—

you see, part of the government of God, supposedly—the hatpin test. The apostle Paul said that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God is not here yet, the government of God is in heaven, it is not in the church.

There are no *men* in the government of God. The government in the church makes mistakes, God never does. In order for the church government to be God's government, there would also have to be infallibility. Church government derives its authority from God, just like every other government on earth. But of all governments on earth, it ought to have the best opportunity because of God's calling, because of conversion, because of having the Holy Spirit, because of having direct access to Him, to rightly administer the principles of God's government.

The operation of God's government absolutely depends on each person governing himself, never to go beyond the parameters of the authority that God has given him—everybody. If you do not get anything else out of this sermon, I want you to get this. The operation of God's government absolutely depends on each person governing himself never to go beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him!

That is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. They did not govern themselves; they went beyond the parameters of the authority God gave to them. He said, "You can eat everything in here except for this one tree," and so they went beyond that and they took from the tree. They stepped beyond the authority God gave to them.

That is what the great benefactors do. God gives them authority and then they take authority to themselves greater than what was given. That is what human nature does. God gave all of mankind the authority to act with free moral agency, but He instructs, He gives His word, and He says, "Obey My word." He commands us to go in this direction. He teaches, but then human nature wants to control matters itself and goes beyond.

That not controlling the self, not governing oneself within the parameters God has laid down, is where the problem comes. That is why there is so much chaos on earth. After we are converted, our study of God's Word largely becomes a search to find the parameters of our authority. To find out

what our attitude is supposed to be toward authority, whether it is civil or ecclesiastical. To find out what our response is to be toward authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical. To find out what our attitude is to be toward those who are under authority. To find out how I am to treat those who are under my authority.

As you grow, as you mature, as your understanding of God's Word, of His truth, of His government begins to really crystallize, you are going to be amazed at how restrained the government of God is in its operations.

Let us go to I Peter 2. Here is a whole string of instructions regarding government. I do not know how anything could be plainer.

I Peter 2:13-23 Therefore submit [*hupotasso*] yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake [you see, a Christian can do that], whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God [is that not what we search the Bible for, for God's will?], that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free [when we were carnal, we did not have this freedom because we did not understand. But God opened our mind, God converted us, God gave us His Spirit], yet not using liberty [free moral agency] as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people [compare that to Romans 13:7: "honor where honor is due"]. Love the brotherhood [you do not just respect the brotherhood, you really love them]. Fear God [That is one step higher]. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, respect [See here comes the response to government. It does not matter whether it is out in the world or in the church, it is due to the person who is in authority. God expects us to submit ourselves] not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. [If the person is harsh, it does not give us an excuse; we are not justified because that boss is mean] For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: [Christ the creator, the ruler of everything, the giver of life, the one who had every right to order anybody about, He submitted. Even when people were wrong, He submitted] "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, [he did not try to control the situation that way] but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

There was His faith; God would vindicate Him. If we go back to verse 13, Peter says, "every ordinance." God does not give us the right to pick and choose which one we are going to submit to and which one we are not. "Oh I like the traffic laws, but I do not like the IRS." Or "I like the laws regarding littering, but I do not like the laws regarding traffic." We are supposed to submit (*hupotasso*), make ourselves subject to, control ourselves, control that human nature, and govern ourselves so that it does not go beyond the parameters of what God has said in His Word.

There is one exception to this, and that is if the ordinance of man, a command of man, a law of man would somehow cause us to sin, to break a law of God, and then Acts 5:29 comes into play: "We ought to obey God rather than men." But even though we obey God, we are still subject—we still have to submit to; *hupotasso*—man's laws because man's laws have penalties attached to them for disobedience. And if, in obedience to God, we break the laws of man, we are therefore subject to the penalty of the laws of man and so when the penalty comes we have to be subject to it. Whether it is a fine or imprisonment, or even death.

Now, what if an elder in the church tells you that you should do something that would cause you to break God's law? We have moved it from the civil authority to the ecclesiastical authority, and he tells you to do something that you do not feel in good conscience that you can do. Paul, who was an elder—an apostle—who had the highest office that can be given in the church, said to follow him as he followed Christ. If Paul was not following Christ, we are not to follow Paul, even though he is in the top of the government.

Remember Colossians 3:18, where it says, "Wives submit to your husbands." Do you remember what it said after that? "As it is fitting." You submit to

your husband unless it does not fit God's rule, then you have the right to disobey your husband, to not (*hupotasso*) arrange yourself under his authority because you arrange yourself under the authority of God, but you are still subject to the husband's wrath and whatever penalty he might impose.

I have here the tribute to Mr. Armstrong in May 1986, *The Good News*, and page 24. It is from the article, "This is the Life, Real Abundant Living," the next to the last paragraph. "The Bible will be the authority that you obey, the authority that you will look to for everything in your life." That says it in a moment. The word of God is the representative of the government of God and it in submitting to the word of God, you are submitting to the government of God.

Let us carry this a little bit further in Paul's advice to Timothy.

I Timothy 5:22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

In the church they are waiting for Christ to do something. In the meantime, they are being drawn further and further into sin, following a man, worshipping a church; that is idolatry. That is the very thing that this article on the image of the beast is about. Those people are sticking there because of government and they believe that it is the government of God. The government of God is in heaven and we are to submit to the word of God, the Bible, and not participate in other people's sins.

Now if you do this, you are going to be labeled self-righteous. So be it! Look who is calling you self-righteous: the sinners. Unfortunately, the great overwhelming majority of those people are doing it in good sincerity and ignorance. The concept of government that has come into their minds. . .like I said, I do not know how it got there, but it got there.

There is a greater responsibility to God and to His Word than there is to any ecclesiastical organization. In order to do that you have to control yourself, you have to govern yourself. I hope this is becoming clearer and clearer.

What if an elder or deacon asked you to do something that is not sin, but is simply not the way you would do it? Now depending on the situation, the

best thing to do is just do it, do it in the best attitude that you possibly can, then go back afterwards and suggest to him the way you feel it ought to be done. I feel there is an exception to that, as well. That is if they should tell you to do something that you feel might put others into danger of pain, injury, or whatever, then I feel that you have a responsibility to make a suggestion back to him before you go and do it. That only makes common sense.

But brethren, nobody, God included, has ever given you the right to openly disobey any authority. I have heard that some feel that they are to be persuaded to do everything. That is not biblical. That might be democratic, but it is not biblical because it is everybody's responsibility to contribute to order, to peace in the well-being of the entire community. We are to be peacemakers, not peace breakers. But at the same time, we do not want to cut off any suggestions that may come from others, because if we do that, meaning by we, elders or deacons, we are not serving you and that is our responsibility.

Christ said in Matthew 20, we are here as your servant. Now, what might be very, very wrong is the way that things are done. By "way" I mean the way the suggestion is given or the order is given. I think more offense has been caused by the *way* this has been done and the actual job assignment or the suggestion that has been given.

Some people—yes, elders and deacons—are so touchy you cannot help but offend them. I do not mean to single them out, those of you who are a part of the congregation, you are that way too. It is a part of human nature, it is the way human nature has adjusted in order to control, and it is wrong. They say, "Well, I am just sensitive." It is something to overcome, that sensitivity. Because to question them is an affront to their pride and so they immediately begin to defend their turf, as if they are somehow infallible. That is not the way the government of God operates.

Sometimes the offense is not caused by the person questioning being in a bad attitude, but simply because he did not understand the original order that was given.

Let us cut this off right here in Colossians 3. No doubt there are many illustrations that I could come up with in regard to specific situations. But it seems to me that the principles that I showed you in Romans 13 and I Peter 2, and hopefully, especially helping you to see that it is everybody's responsibility to govern themselves.

Colossians 3:5-6 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: [it is talking about our sins, our peculiarities of our personality] Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth.

Is that part of the way the government of God operates? No, it does not. God does not do those things and we are disciples. We are in training to become a part of that government.

Colossians 3:10 And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge [That is what we are coming to understand] according to the image of Him who created him.

We have to govern ourselves in order to be able to do this.

Colossians 3:12-15 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering [do you understand, these are choices we make, choices that we are now free to make, because God converted us?]; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond [the glue that unifies] of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Listen to this description of godly character, taken from the old *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 16, and page 14, in a Personal from Mr. Armstrong:

The attainment of the ability in a separate independent entity of free moral agency to be able to discern right from wrong, the true values from the false, truth from error, the right way from the wrong [here begins the self government:] and then to make the right choice, we have to govern ourselves to make that choice or decision even against self desire, impulse or temptation, plus the will and the self discipline to resist the wrong and do the right.

If we do not govern ourselves those carnal impulses will take over and force us to go the way of carnality. They have to be held in check. Self-government, brethren, is the absolutely necessary step before there can be godly character. The godly character is the end result of someone disciplining himself, controlling himself, governing himself with the knowledge given him by the Spirit of God and using the power of God to do that governing. This is everybody's responsibility and unless we do it there will be no godly character. So if we are ever going to be like God and be in His Kingdom, we must govern ourselves.